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British Churches, Participation and Community Development

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Social Science

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

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British churches and community development

Introduction

In the British welfare sector, the role of religious groups in offering faith based welfare provision is substantial and addresses a wide variety of needs. Such action is not confined to the Christian faith, since other religious faiths generate welfare initiatives of their own. Nor is faith motivated welfare provision restricted to meeting basic human needs, as it can include efforts to build community relations and also encompasses community development approaches that support citizens to come together to create self-help projects. In fact the latter themes sometimes appear linked in social policy where community development is seen as a way of generating cohesive and cooperative communities, particularly in areas where there are ethnic divides to be bridged (Pearmain and Hatamian 2011: 1-2).

This thesis focusses on one aspect of faith involvement in the welfare sector. It investigates whether British churches can adopt a community development approach, and in so doing, produce the positive outcomes that are associated with community participation neighbourhood regeneration. In this chapter I show how that topic has become pertinent to today's welfare climate and the community development profession. I introduce a number of research questions that must be answered in order to argue that churches can embrace a community development approach, and outline how these questions are addressed in my literature reviews and case studies of churches in the chapters that follow.

The church and the welfare sector

The church as a provider of welfare services

The role of the church in the welfare sector has evolved over the decades, in response to societal changes and government policy attitudes towards faith based welfare provision. Key literary sources documenting the history of welfare in Britain (e.g. Hill 2003, Harris 2004) do not cover the evolution of church welfare through the 20th century. However, it is certain that the creation of a nationalised welfare state impacted upon the work of the church, by transferring certain types of welfare such as education and basic social care from church to state. Billings (2002: 4-6) recalls that the resulting drop in demand for traditional pastoral support, prompted some clergy to take on the functions of care professionals. From the 1960s onwards there was a temptation for such clergy to model themselves on social workers, councillors or other types of professional workers in the community (ibid).

In the 1980s, British churches responded to the changing context of welfare needs through two notable developments. In 1983 the Methodist Church launched its Mission Alongside the Poor – a programme of social care that recognised the reality of poverty despite the existence of a welfare state, and funded over 200 projects over the next ten years (Dyson 1994: 215-16). It was followed by the Anglican report *Faith in the City* (Archbishop of Canterbury's Urban Priorities Commission 1985) which made churches more aware of urban poverty and called on them to engage with their surrounding communities (Garner 2004: 23-4). An interesting feature of the Anglican report was its criticism of both the church and the Thatcher government's failure to do enough to tackle poverty, as well as the capitalist structures that reproduced conditions of poverty. On the recommendation of *Faith in the City*, church resources were reallocated according to areas of need, and more money was invested in youth work (Dinham 2008: 2165-66). A Church Urban Fund was established in 1987 and has since supported thousands of faith based welfare initiatives.

From the 1990s there was increasing political recognition of the value of faith groups as partners in regeneration. In 1992 the Inner Cities Religious Council was formed under the government of John Major to provide a gateway for the government to interact with faith communities. Then with the election of New Labour in 1997, came steps towards involving faith groups in regeneration programmes. The DETR (1999) issued guidelines for working with faith communities, and policy-makers noted the resources possessed by faith groups, including buildings and volunteers, which could be directed towards needs in childcare and community safety (Home Office 2004). New Labour grounded a shared responsibility for welfare provision in the philosophy of civil society, influenced by Etzioni's (1993) communitarianism which emphasised rights and responsibilities. The delivery of public services by non-profit agencies was seen as a way of enabling voice and strengthening communities, transforming public services and supporting social enterprise (Cabinet Office 2007: 11). In this mixed economy of welfare, Harris (1998: 8-9) sees the church re-emerging as a provider of welfare services, now that the age of the centralised Welfare State is being diminished. Dinham (2008: 2172) observes that the government's communitarian vision was embraced by the Anglican follow-up to *Faith in the City*, a successor report titled *Faithful Cities* (Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006). In particular, *Faithful Cities* does not continue to blame socioeconomic structures for poverty but instead, recommends solutions based on regeneration partnerships and active citizenship.

The pluralisation of the welfare sector looks set to continue under the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition, and with similar justifications. Plans to give

local non-profit organisation powers to bid for the right to run community assets, are to be one component of the 'Big Society' approach of devolving power to non-governmental organisations as a means of improving services and strengthening civil society (Cabinet Office 2010a: 6). In April 2011 the co-chairman of the Conservative Party, Baroness Warsi, spoke at the Catholic Bishops' Social Action Conference. Acknowledging the contribution that churches have made in addressing social needs, Warsi reiterated that the government is keen to deepen its existing engagement with the faith sector (Cabinet Office 2011). How churches will choose to respond to new opportunities presented by the Big Society remains to be seen. In the Anglican report *Moral, But No Compass*, Davies et al (2008) react with caution over the idea of the Anglican Church expanding its work in the third sector. Part of their message to the government is that partnership arrangements and funding would have to reflect long-term commitment from the government. On the other hand, the authors make it clear that there is scope for churches to take on an even greater role. An intelligent guess would be that churches will be interested in new policy inviting them to engage with communities through welfare, but that there will also be a calculative consideration of the negative possibilities such as becoming reliant on government support that may not last.

The church as a promoter of social cohesion

Closely related to the interest in faith groups as welfare providers and partners in regeneration, has been an interest in the contribution of faith in nurturing the fabric of civil society. Putnam's (2000) argument, that North American society has been witnessing a breakdown of its social networks that enable collective voluntary action, draws attention to the part played by faith groups in keeping civil society intact in multicultural Britain. Thus, government policy on social inclusion is favourable towards faith involvement in developing active citizenship, especially as some faith groups have experience of working alongside marginalised communities (Dinham 2008: 2170). During the office of the 1997-2010 New Labour government, the Social Exclusion Unit published multiple documents addressing the role of faith in promoting cohesion (Farnell 2001: 264). Further motivations to encourage faith groups to build community relations and integrate marginalised people into civil society, came in the form of ethnic tensions and religious extremism. The Bradford riots in 2001 and the 7/7 London bus bombing in 2005, prompted new policy initiatives with this aim (Dinham and Lowndes 2009: 6, Chauhan 2009: 1). Policy initiatives designed to involve faith communities in reducing division and extremism have included: *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government's Strategy to Increase Race Equality*

and Community Cohesion (Home Office 2005) and *Preventing Violent Extremism* (CLG 2007a, CLG 2007b).

In Britain a body of academic theory has built up around ideas that faith groups can indeed address the challenges of multiculturalism and promote social cohesion. Furbey et al (2006: 7-8, 19-21) point out that all of the main religions contain moral traditions that can inspire good relations and joined-up working between different ethnic sectors in a neighbourhood. They say also that that by providing venues and activities for people to engage with others, faith groups such as churches are able to increase the potential for citizens to build networks of relationships. Torry (2005: 152) observes that with memberships and links to their surrounding communities, churches naturally foster social contacts and the development of social skills among people. Farnell (2001: 266) adds that ethnic faith groups have much to contribute to discussions of civil society. They serve as generators of social cohesion and may have personal experiences of social isolation that can helpfully inform their perspectives. Farnell also argues that just by bringing their different worldviews to the table, faith groups offer new frameworks for analysing social problems such as community breakdown.

The concept of using faith as a promoter of social cohesion faces some intellectual challenges. Furbey et al (2006: 10-1) accept that religious faiths can be divisive, not only through violent religious action, but also when adherents feel the need to construct social boundaries emphasising their distinctiveness from other faith sectors and the secular world. Chapman (2008: 81-3) writes that there needs to be a clearer understanding of what it meant by “cohesive society” and what specific aims are to be achieved. She writes that cohesion and integration might be best achieved by allowing faith groups to decide together which priorities are important to them, instead of beginning with a pre-set government agenda. Possibly the devolution of power to local communities in the Big Society, together with a continuing policy interest in faith involvement in civil society, will offer new opportunities to realise the conditions that Chapman recommends.

The church as an empowerer of ordinary people

Another contemporary option is for churches to serve as partners in broad based community organisations. This form of social action originated with Alinsky’s (1972) method of bringing together existing groups and people networks in the 1940s, to take political action around their common interests. In this context churches join with other parties to contribute resources, represent grassroots concerns, and add their religious voice to the pressure brought

to bear upon the relevant authorities (Furbey et al 1997: 146). The Church Urban Fund made donations of capital to the first British community organisations launched in the 1990s. Many churches have joined the London Citizens Network – a community organisation that started in 2001 and has been described as “an alliance of faith institutions, universities and schools, trade unions and community groups (Citizens UK 2010).” Actions so far have included a campaign for a Living Wage and the CitySafe campaign to remove crime from the streets.

It is also argued that churches can facilitate the participation of their local surrounding communities in neighbourhood regeneration. This was the theme of the 1999-2001 Taking Part workshops that were sponsored by the Church Urban Fund and the DTLR¹ and attended by representatives from fourteen faith groups (Lewis and Randolph-Horn 2001: 11). The workshops discussed ways that faith groups could venture beyond the boundaries of their traditional roles as providers to empowering communities to participate in regeneration initiatives. Among the recommendations was the suggestion that churches can support local residents to plan and implement their own action, which could involve churches helping residents to develop their ideas and abilities in community self-help projects. Another suggestion was that churches can adapt their traditional organisational structures to be able to nurture and encourage smaller community organisations. Such notions are not about churches disowning their traditional behaviours but transforming their roles so that the work of the church is of benefit to more people. As Lewis and Randolph-Horn (2001: 11) put it:

The transformative roles aim to bring these benefits to everyone in the community, regardless of their faith, and to enable everyone in the community to bring about change.

The report on the Taking Part Workshops gives the illustrative example of some mothers who belonged to a church on a council estate. In cooperation with a regeneration charity the mothers began to turn an area of wasteland into a children’s play area. It was decided that the wider community should be involved, so fun events were organised to bring residents together to discuss plans. Young people who had been inquisitive about what was going on became involved with constructing the play area, which helped to build constructive relations between different age groups. From this the community realised that they had

¹ The government’s Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

power to make transformations, and new resident-led projects emerged (ibid: 13). A notable feature of this report is that it advocates churches adopting principles found in community development, such as a belief in the abilities of residents and a passion for communities to become proactive. The contributors claim that regeneration will be at its best when projects build upon the knowledge and ideas of local people. They also say that empowering residents to transform their neighbourhood can generate feelings of self worth and community pride (ibid: 9). Again these are views that are expressed in community development (e.g. Ife 2002: 102, 108; Woodward 2004: 11).

The community development option

The Community Development model of neighbourhood regeneration is committed to enabling the active participation of groups of people in improving their quality of life. Development typically takes place at the neighbourhood level and aims to enable residents to articulate and address their needs through confidence building, skills training and social action (Poppo 1995: 56, 60-1). The Standing Conference for Community Development² listed as one of its main priorities the support of collective action led by community members themselves (SCCD 2001: 4-6). Notions that churches could employ this community development approach were hinted as long ago as 1968, when a publication by the Gulbenkian Foundation argued that workers in the community should be “helping local people to decide, plan and take action to meet their own needs with the help of available outside resources (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1968: 149).” Their publication argued that:

This community work function should be a recognised part of the professional practice of teachers, social workers, *the clergy*, health workers, architects, planners, administrators and others (*italics added*).

Strictly speaking there are two aspects to this. Firstly there is the possibility that church leaders can use community development methods to empower their lay members to develop the personal attributes and confidence to be able to plan and implement their own social action. Secondly there is the possibility that churches could support their local surrounding communities to do the same. So in the same way that churches have traditionally cared for

² Now called the Community Development Exchange.

their own members as well as their surrounding communities, the community development option could be used to empower church members and the wider community alike.

There is little mention of the church in contemporary community development literature, suggesting either that the community development approach has not been widely taken up by churches, or that community development literature has a secular bias – as has been argued is the case for literature on overseas development (Deneulin and Bano 2009). Henderson (2008: 27, 39) mentions the Christian activist Bob Holman's practice of living among the poor as "a resourceful friend" and also notes that some churches employ their own neighbourhood worker. But neither point provides evidence of churches empowering people to implement their own social action. Farnell et al (2003: 19-20) observe that faith leaders have worked in regeneration partnerships and have challenged management boards over a lack of community participation, or little willingness to listen to the people. But Farnell et al also mention that faith leaders themselves do not necessarily empower people, and are sometimes seen as retaining too much power (ibid: 22).

A strand of thought that appears in work by Dinham alleges the existence of many faith motivated community development projects (2007: 7), and argues that individual empowerment has long been a part of the outreach work of faith groups (2009: 82). However, Dinham often does not demonstrate convincingly that the projects he cites emerged from the collective conscientisation of the whole faith group. Most could have arisen from the ambitions of faith leaders in a top-down fashion, with only minimal involvement of ordinary members in the initial decision-making. More convincing are the examples of faith groups supported by the Community Development Foundation to work on projects with groups of differing faiths. These projects have clearly been designed to bring together different kinds of people to discuss what could be done to improve situations in their locality (e.g. Evison 2010: ch. 2). A lot of the focus has been on building the capacity for dialogue between people of different faiths, with less concentration on other themes of community development such as self-help as a route to gaining self-esteem and liberation from feelings of personal powerlessness.

Two bodies that assist British churches to employ some community development principles are the organisations Tearfund and Livability (formerly the Shaftesbury Society). These organisations have formed a partnership, providing advisors and various courses in support of churches that seek to generate social action in their neighbourhood. Course materials emphasise listening to individuals, capacity building and encouraging church members to apply Christian theology to community issues. However, the training resources

say little about extending the process to empower other local residents. For example, Livability has formulated a “Social Action Journey” outlining the stages by which churches ask communities what the local needs are and then devise action to address those needs (Livability 2010: 7-8). There is no definite stage that mentions the church supporting the wider community to establish its own projects. With some similarities to Livability, the *Discovery* course offered by Tearfund (2010) provides a framework for the participation of all members of a church in devising a social action strategy to tackle community issues. Introduced by experienced practitioners, it emphasises the value of including local knowledge and abilities held by the wider community. Yet the course outline does not specifically address how churches can promote self-help within their surrounding communities. In addition to the work of these organisations, the Community Development Foundation has provided support for faith groups affiliated to a variety of different religions, through its administration of the Faiths in Action Fund. The overall funding has been relatively small scale (at £4 million) and has been directed mainly toward projects that promote understanding and tolerance between different faiths, and between faith groups and the wider community. The focus has been upon participants growing in confidence and capacity to build working relationships with people of different religious and cultural backgrounds (Evison 2010: 2).

The above settings suggest a need to research whether churches could adopt the participatory principles of community development. One rationale for such research would be that theory has been put forward to suggest that churches can facilitate community participation, but this has received little in the way of academic investigation. So there is a current shortfall in findings and knowledge relevant to a theoretical field. A second reason lies in the policy climate that encourages churches to increase their role in welfare provision, as well as the church’s own enthusiasm to provide community care. If as claimed by community development practitioners, the participation of communities in neighbourhood regeneration can increase human well-being, then theories that churches can facilitate participation call for research as a matter of public interest. Interestingly Christian overseas aid agencies utilise participation as a means of tackling hardship in developing countries. Examples include Christian Aid’s policy of working in partnership with grassroots organisations to promote the participation of local people (Christian Aid (1993), and Tearfund’s Participatory Disaster Risk method – in which staff work with local people to ascertain their risks to certain hazards and ability to implement their own emergency action (Venton et al 2006). If Christian aid agencies find community empowerment an effective

strategy to use abroad, could not the Christian churches use it to help communities in Britain? This constitutes a further reason for studying whether British churches can adopt a community development approach.

In a society where churches are looking to increase their provision of social care, there is greater opportunity for community development agencies to engage with churches and help them branch out into community development. Perhaps there is also scope for community development practitioners to work with government departments and church representatives in devising community empowerment strategies for churches to consider. That possibility is perhaps strengthened by the current government's "Big Society" ideology, as the renewed focus on civil society increases the appeal of community development as a method of grassroots action (Scott 2010: 134). Yet all this is to assume that the community development approach is a viable option for churches to follow. Critics have questioned whether participation works well as developmental strategy (e.g. Cooke and Kothari 2002). There would also need to be theological justifications for churches to be persuaded to embrace community development principles. In addition, doubts have been raised as to whether churches can adapt their traditional ways of working which have not been especially orientated towards grassroots empowerment (Wallis 1998: 307). Finally, there would have to be evidence that positive outcomes can be achieved by churches taking on a role in community development. These challenges are critical to the prospect that churches could find in community development new ways to engage with communities and contribute solutions to human needs.

Overview of this thesis

The questions asked

In this thesis I draw from community development theory a main research question: "Can churches produce the benefits associated with participation, by adopting the participatory principles of community development?" I also raise four sub-questions that are necessary to answer the main research question:

- 1) Have community development participatory principles been found to work in wider society?
- 2) Can a theological case be constructed for churches to adopt these principles?
- 3) Could churches transform their traditional work with communities in ways consistent with community development principles?

- 4) Is there evidence that positive outcomes can be achieved by churches adopting a community development approach?

If all four sub-questions can be answered affirmatively, then it could be argued that churches *can* adopt the participatory principles of community development and produce the associated benefits. However, if one of these questions cannot be answered affirmatively, the community development option will seem a less attractive proposition for churches to consider.

The case studies

In order to answer the above questions, I made three case studies of individual Christian churches in my fieldwork. I chose churches that provided a weekly programme of welfare services such as toddler groups or lunch clubs in disadvantaged communities, hoping that this combination of welfare services and community needs would provide opportunity to make a detailed study of church based welfare provision. The main challenges that I saw lay in the great diversity among Christian churches and neighbourhoods where they were located. In response to these problems, I tried to choose churches representative of mainstream denominations; I also narrowed my focus to similar types of neighbourhood in the hope of at least being able to speak informatively about the actions of churches in communities such as these.

I used local knowledge to locate my first case study. This was a church that I could reach daily with transport from my own home to avoid the expense of having to pay for accommodation. Another consideration was that it belonged to an international denomination, which slightly increased the generalisability of the findings. It was located in an area that did not have a high level of ethnic diversity as a very large proportion of the inhabitants were white British. This was a deliberate choice, as I felt that the study would become overwhelmed if wide ranging cultural factors were to be taken into account in addition to factors such as social class and religiosity. A feature of the first case study area was that although this neighbourhood was traditionally working class, there was an influx of middle class newcomers, some of whom attended the local church.

An internet search was used to locate my second case study. A church in a different city was chosen, but according to several of the criteria that I had used to select the first case study. That is, I chose a church that I could reach daily with transport from my own home, that also belonged to an international denomination, and which was located in an area that

did not have a high level of ethnic diversity. A difference between this second case study and the first was that there was no noticeable influx of middle-class residents to the area. I thought that this disparity might result in a different composition of the church congregation, thus producing some useful comparative factors.

Characteristics of the first two case study churches prompted me to consider focussing the thesis on themes of church and the empowerment of grassroots people. This meant that it became important to study a third church that took participation seriously. I would be able to explore whether the participatory approach of this third church resulted in particular advantages and disadvantages in comparison to the others. Enquiries were made to various Christian organisations as to where I could find such a church. Only one organisation responded to my communications, recommending a Christian intentional community³ that held a strong interest in participation. I therefore studied this intentional community as a third ‘church’ on the basis that it performed the same functions as a mainstream church including regular worship, fellowship, pastoral care and outreach to the community, and that it fitted with the theologian’s definition of a church as a company of Christian believers.⁴ This third case study area was characterised by a high level of ethnic diversity which I had tried to avoid in my research strategy. However, it was the only option available.

The remaining chapters of the thesis

In the first chapter of my thesis I summarise community development theory and identify eight key community development principles of participation. These principles can be viewed as ethical values as well as practical rules for empowering communities. For example, the principle of building up the confidence of individuals so that they can participate in neighbourhood regeneration, can be considered morally correct and is also a key step for successful community involvement. With these eight principles I broadly operationalise community development so that I can address my research questions. Participation as a developmental strategy has been challenged by critics and commentators; therefore my first chapter considers literary evidences for and against participation, to help answer the question of whether these principles are found to work in wider society.

³ Christian intentional communities usually endeavour to live out their faith in a way based upon regular contact, hospitality, sharing and the common life. One inspiration for this model is the meeting and sharing of the early believers described in the New Testament book of Acts.

⁴ As implied by the Greek word *ecclesia* which denotes “church” in the original text of the New Testament (Vine 1997: 75-6).

My second chapter examines liberation theology and urban theology to investigate whether a theological case for participation can be constructed from them. Although these theologies face some problems and are not mainstream, they do offer the most extensive analysis of how participatory principles might find support in the Christian scriptures. The aim is to investigate whether these theologies provide a case for participation that can be accepted by the churches, as it would be impractical to suggest that churches promote community participation if no motivating theological case could be found. In addition, liberation and urban theology offer viewpoints and examples of participation which help to answer whether churches are able to transform their traditional ways of working, as well as whether positive outcomes can be achieved by churches following a community development approach.

The third chapter outlines the methodology that I used to conduct case studies of three separate churches. I include my research techniques and other criteria that came into the fieldwork. I also mention my own experiences of my local community and how these exerted some influence over my analysis. The fourth and fifth chapters contain my first two case studies. In these studies I investigate the demography of the area where each church was located, and examples of secular community development work that were being carried out in the same locality. I give attention to authority structures and motivating factors that I encountered in the churches, which I find helpful in explaining church activity. I discuss each church's organisational system in light of the character of the surrounding community and people's responses to local community development projects. The analysis produces some evidence to address whether positive outcomes could be achieved by churches adopting a community development approach. My study of the community development projects casts further light on the question of whether participatory principles work in practice in wider society.

The sixth chapter reports on my third case study, which was of a small Christian intentional community. The participation of all of its members was a foundational point for the intentional community, as was apparent in its theology, organisation style and activities. My study of this faith group found more material relevant to a theological case for participation, as well as some evidence of positive outcomes that could emerge if churches were to adopt a community development approach. The intentional community was located in an area where a neighbourhood regeneration scheme had been managed in a top-down fashion and had caused problems due to a failure to value the participation of local people. In

this way the regeneration scheme offers some indirect support for the use of participatory principles.

In chapter seven I bring together evidences from my literature review and fieldwork to answer my research questions. I argue the case that churches can indeed produce benefits associated with participation by adopting the participatory principles of community development. I also argue that these principles of participation have relevance to the church. The discussion is followed by a final chapter in which I answer my research questions and suggest directions for future research.

1. Participatory principles in community development

To answer the question of whether churches can adopt the participatory principles of community development, it is first necessary to find out what those principles are and whether they have been found to work in wider society. Therefore this chapter devolves community development's theme of participation into eight main principles. Evidences for and against participation are considered, in order to test whether these principles offer a viable alternative to top-down forms of neighbourhood regeneration and welfare provision.

Community development as an emerging profession

From the late 1950s, community development began to grow as a distinct field, so that it is now considered both a subject and a profession in its own right (Gilchrist 2004: 21). However, community development is complicated by differing definitions of community and by overlaps with other disciplines. In a reader compiled from the *Community Development Journal*, Mayo (2008: 14) notes that 94 different definitions of community have been identified since the journal was first published – a diversity which brings into question how far community development can address any precisely agreed concept. Yet it can be argued that the absence of a universal definition of community does not mean that community development cannot exist either in theory or practice. Mayo points out that most other important concepts have been the focus of competing definitions, and Brent (2009: 204) draws from Wittgenstein (1976) to reason that while the term “community” may have no exact truth, its inexactness does not render the term unusable. Ife (2002: 84) argues that it is precisely because community is experienced subjectively and cannot be treated as a straightforward entity, that one of the aims of community development should be to help people construct their own versions of community through reflection, discussion and collective action.

In trying to loosely define what community is, some theorists have looked to factors which connect people in some way, such as common interests, shared values and collaboration. Thus, Sutton (1983: 59) defines community as a segment of society, the essence of which is those parts that are collectively significant to its members: “Whatever developments require group decision or sanction, whatever happenings express unit loyalty or symbolise collective identity for a given resident population – these constitute community.” Gilchrist (2007: iii) sees community as a set of people who are associated with each other through interactions and common interests. Location, identity and shared

experiences could be the things that these people have in common. There is also a tendency to construct definitions according to a set of ideals, so that features of communities are described in relation to community development aims. In this way, Ife (2002: 80-1) sees community as a form of social organisation with the characteristics summarised below:

1. Interactions are sufficiently small-scale that people in the community can take ownership of them, as opposed to wider structures of society which are too large and centralised for local ownership.
2. Community involves some sense of belonging or membership to the group.
3. Membership carries a responsibility to participate in community activities, thus helping to maintain the structures of the community.
4. Community implies relationships that are affective and rooted in belonging, in contrast to the impersonal, calculative relationships characteristic of modern societies. This constitutes a foundation for positive interactions.⁵
5. Within the community there is opportunity to develop a local culture and this enriching process can be used to promote people participation and the utilisation of their skills and abilities.

Definitions of community development stress emancipatory values such as equality and freedom to participate in local issues. In 2001 the Standing Conference for Community Development defined its field thus:

Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives (SCCD 2001: 5).

Similarly, Waddington (1994: 5) maintains that the values base of community work favours the grassroots liberation of people, especially excluded and powerless groups, through processes of collective action. Gilchrist (2004: 21) uses the above focus on participation to distinguish between community development and other welfare services such as social work. For her, the practice of helping communities to identify needs and devise collective solutions to those needs sets community development apart from the other professions. But

⁵ Tonnies' (1955) distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

Twelvetrees (2008: 2) points out that this sort of work might feature in other services provided by social workers, the clergy, health workers or housing officers etc.

The degree to which communities are supported to participate in local issues is called “empowerment” and attempts have been made to categorise the different dimensions of empowerment, such as the development of strong local leadership, equal relations with partner agencies and control over project management (Laverack 2005: 5). Distinctions are made between pluralist and radical schools of community development. The pluralist school maintains that power in society is held by multiple competing groups such as organisations, the media, the private sector and trade unions. This branch of community development aims to achieve transformations at the local level, by supporting communities to secure their own power to effect change amidst these competing groups. The radical school, on the other hand, is critical of what are seen as oppressive structures of society such as capitalist and patriarchal forms of organisation. It favours praxis that aims to address community needs by tackling their structural origins (Ledwith 2005: 12).

Although it is accepted that there is no universally ‘correct’ approach to working with communities, typical patterns can be detected in community development literature. Often the process starts at the grassroots level by bringing together residents who want to contribute towards change (SCCD 2001: 6). This is skilled work that involves gaining the trust of community members through face-to-face contact and making it known that their ideas will be considered important. Group discussions and workshops are set up, to enable residents to share experiences and ideas, grow in confidence and develop consciousness of local problems and their causes (Packham 2008: ch. 2). Together, residents work out what improvements they want to make to their neighbourhood and how they want to do it. They may be supported to seek help from partners such as voluntary organisations or public service departments, and a strategic network builds up with residents at the hub. The role of the community worker is usually that of enabler, neighbourhood worker and facilitator (Popple 1995: 56). Typically a community worker moves at a group’s own pace, but at times may take on a more directive role, for example when participants have not yet acquired sufficient motivational drive or obtained some of the necessary skills (Twelvetrees 2008: 6).

A history of community development

Key stages in the rise of community development in Britain came in the late 1950s and 1960s, beginning with theories that treated community action as a subset of social work (Smith 2006, 1996). The *Younghusband Report* (1959) drew from the North American model

of community organisation, to argue for supporting communities to identify their own needs and develop strategies for addressing those needs. Following this, Kuenstler (1961) edited and published a body of material on the same theme adapted to British society. Although the latter work continued to use the term “community organisation”, area based community work would later come to be known as community development (Ledwith 2005: 10). Other initiatives were also underway. The first edition of the *Community Development Journal* was released in 1966 and the Association of Community Workers was established in 1968 (Henderson 2008: 9).

The *Seebohm Report* published in 1968, recommended transformations to the way that welfare services were organised, and partly as a result of the report, community development staff were employed in social services departments across the country (Henderson 2008: 8). In the same year a study group established by the Gulbenkian Foundation concluded that the purpose of community work was to support local people to plan and take action to meet community needs with help from outside resources. This goal encompassed the improvement of local services, the formation of interagency partnerships and the involvement of residents in local planning and policy. The Gulbenkian report recommended that the approach be taken up by many types of professionals, including teachers, social workers, the clergy, health workers, administrators and city planners (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1968: 149). Two related strands of thought emerged within community development theory. The first envisaged community development as a form of welfare provision that utilises community self-help as a resource. The second emphasised the personal capacity building that people gain through involvement in local affairs and neighbourhood regeneration. These two themes would come to merge (Gilchrist 2004: 14). The influence of community development theory was starting to show, with the *Skeffington Report* (1969) arguing for community involvement in town planning and the *Fairbairn-Milsom Report* (1969) examining youth work through a community development lens. The Gulbenkian Foundation went on to produce another report in 1973, further encouraging investment in grassroots participation.

This was a time of recognition that despite the early optimism and vigour of postwar era of reconstruction, the welfare state was failing to tackle poverty and deprivation in many areas – as had been made clear in Abel-Smith and Townsend’s (1965) publication, *The Poor and the Poorest*. Meanwhile the nation was experiencing rises in unemployment due to the slowing down of economic growth, and elsewhere, racial discrimination and tensions as migrant workers from former British colonies were encouraged to settle and fill job

vacancies. Similar problems were experienced in North America and in 1964, the US War on Poverty programme commenced with support for community participation in area based programmes written into its constitution (Mayo 2008: 19-20; Mayo and Robertson 2003: 25-6).

With parallels to the War on Poverty, the Labour government launched the 1968 Community Development Programme, aimed mainly at easing unrest springing from unemployment and racial tensions. Out of the Community Development Programme came twelve Community Development Projects that targeted individual urban communities. The main thrust of the projects was to remedy a sense of social breakdown and depersonalisation by encouraging residents to improve their situations through participatory and self-help initiatives (Tallon 2010: 38-9). The government analysis underlying this programme saw people themselves as the source of the problems, influenced by theories that poverty and deprivation were passed on by parents to the next generation (Rutter and Madge 1976 cited by Ledwith 2005: 11). However, the community workers and researchers involved with these projects adopted structuralist views, tending towards critiques which traced deprivations to inequalities of wealth and power in capitalist systems (Popple 1995: 18). From this the radical wing of community development emerged, basing itself upon a Marxist analysis of disadvantage in neighbourhoods. Activity in the projects typically involved mobilising residents to campaign for welfare rights, a better wage or improved housing conditions (Henderson 2008: 9). These criticisms of the state, coupled with the encouragement of groups to think up militant solutions to needs, proved unpopular with the government and the programme was brought to an end in 1978 (Tallon 2010: 39). By the late 1970s the task of addressing urban economic decline via the Inner Cities programme had been assigned to national and local government, with little ongoing interest in strategies based upon the participation of communities (Mayo and Robertson 2003: 27).

Other transitions to take place during this period had an impact on the evolution of community development. During the 1960s and 1970s, western nations encountered large scale counter-culture protests including student activism, race riots and the civil rights and feminist movements. The translation of Gramsci's (1971) *Prison Notebooks* and Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into English were also influential, especially on the growth of radical community development (Ledwith 2005: 11). Gramsci's work included his theory that the power exercised by one social class over another, is maintained not only by force but by ideologies that justify oppression and inequality. Freire's analysis included a view that people's own experiences and narratives about their life situations could be

harnessed as catalysts for change. Together these theories suggested that community workers can stimulate communities to take action by encouraging them to challenge dominant ideas with their own accounts of reality (Popple 1994: 29-30). Political awareness among some community workers caused them to rebel against the control function of the welfare state and public care professions (Ledwith 2005: 11). They also sought to distinguish their work from charitable activities such as those of churches, as well as social work with its pathological identification of social problems (Waddington 1994: 6). At the same time, pluralist versions of community development were making advances. Reports such as the *Seebohm Report* had succeeded in persuading the 1970s government to increase public participation in service delivery. Community development workers of all schools of thought now saw the opportunity for communities to have input over decisions that affected their lives. Themes of local democracy thereby became firmly embedded in community development perspectives (Gilchrist 2004: 16).

Far reaching political change was imminent with the election of the Thatcher government in 1979. Right wing thinkers attacked the welfare state, accusing it of being expensive and inefficient, and of promoting a culture of dependency. A shortage of state resources linked to economic recession became a prominent problem (Beresford and Croft 1993: 2). Thatcher and the American president Reagan believed in the freeing up of market mechanisms as necessary to the health of the economy. As for the renewal of neighbourhoods, the answer lay in rolling back the responsibilities of the state and giving the market a greater part to play in regeneration. In Britain, new policies towards urban regeneration were built upon neoliberal economics, with public subsidies, tax breaks and the easing of controls such as planning restrictions, designed to encourage the business sector into investing in the cities. The idea was that some of the resultant wealth generated by the new economic growth would trickle down into local communities. Distrust of Labour controlled authorities prompted Conservative ministers to emphasise private sector involvement in most regeneration projects (Foley and Martin 2000: 481).

Ledwith (2005: 12) writes of how the anti-state approach of radical community development became ineffective at this time, not least because the state was the employer of most community workers. Some theorists recommended that community action could be promoted within the system, wherever government and community workers' agendas converged. By accepting the state as a partner, the state might be encouraged to see the value of public participation. In reality, many local authority employed community workers were forced to concentrate on managerial goals such as efficient service delivery and use of

resources, while spending cuts did away with the kind of community worker that might have been able to mobilise residents to campaign (Gilchrist 2004: 18). However, interest in participation began to increase in the service sector (Smith 1996, 2006). Users of welfare services reacted against the social control practised by these administrations and the poor quality of care given. Service users and staff alike argued for decentralised management with more citizen input. New types of service were created that offered more in the way of service user participation, with examples including women's organisations that established buddy schemes and domestic abuse centres, as well as services for disabled people that were managed by the disabled themselves. These movements emphasised rights and needs, gifts and abilities, and the valuable role of the citizen in society (Beresford and Croft 1993: 3). Demands for equal rights from self-help organisations, such as those set up by ethnic groups and the disabled, brought the principle of equality to the fore in public participation. Non-discriminatory practice thereby became integrated into community development and community work training (Gilchrist 2004: 17-18).

By the mid 1980s there were doubts as to whether communities were seeing the benefits of the government's business orientated urban regeneration strategies (Holman 2000: 27-36). There were also concerns that the market based approach served to intensify poverty and inequality among the population, by producing an uneven distribution of benefits across the country and between social groups (Imrie and Raco 2003: 7). In response to these concerns, subsequent regeneration projects such as later generation Urban Development Corporations, began to take community orientated schemes seriously, with some setting up community forums so as to engage with residents and discover more about their needs (Foley and Martin 2000: 481). Efforts to create an umbrella organisation to represent community workers eventually led to the formation of the Standing Conference for Community Development⁶ in 1991 (Henderson 2008: 11).

A move towards greater community participation began to materialise in the 1990s under the Conservative government. Funding schemes initiated by Major, including the City Challenge and its successor, the Single Development Budget, reflected a new interest in combining input from the community with that of the public and business sectors (Foley and Martin 2000: 481). The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was of particular importance, as it was the main source of financial support for area regeneration between 1995 and 2001. A feature of both the City Challenge and the SRB was the bidding system, whereby partners from the community, public and private sectors would liaise to formulate a regeneration plan

⁶ Later to be renamed the Community Development Exchange.

and bid for funding in competition with other such partnerships (DTLR 2002: 2). Successful bidders were those whose partnership included delegations from the community and who could provide evidence of community participation in their plans, as government interest in community participation increased over the years while the Single Regeneration Budget was in operation (ODPM: 2002: 2). Local people deemed to be community representatives were now given places on management panels alongside city Councillors and representatives from business partners. Yet doubts remained as to whether the shift towards community participation was proving effective. The predominance of the business and public sectors in terms of power and access to resources, brought the criticism that communities were “given a mere presence rather than a voice” (Cameron and Davoudi 1998: 250). It was also unclear whether there had been any transformation of the overall sense of alienation from local governance felt by communities (Foley and Martin 2000: 481).

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 breathed fresh impetus into participation as a regeneration strategy, creating what Henderson (2008: 12) has called “a window of opportunity” for community development. A surge of communitarian political thought in North America and Britain, shared with community development theory the view that area regeneration is best achieved by forms of social organisation that enable communities to act as partners (Stites 1998: 57; Ledwith 2005: 16). Policy advisors such as Giddens (1998) advocated partnerships between state and society as part of the ‘third way’ – a middle ground view of governance situated between neoliberal economics and traditional left wing tendencies towards state control. Neighbourhood regeneration depended upon individual responsibility but not “competitive individualism or unfettered markets” (Imrie and Raco 2003: 7). By adopting strands of communitarian thought, New Labour essentially incorporated community development principles into its politics. The *Urban White Paper*, which outlined Labour’s early ambitions for the future of towns and cities, stated that:

People have a right to determine their future and be involved in how their town or city develops... It is not enough to consult people about decisions that will impact on their lives: they must be fully engaged from the start, and everybody should be included (ODPM 2000: 32).

The “everybody” in the above statement denotes people of all social categories i.e. people of different ethnic groups, genders and age groups, as well as the disabled and people of different religious faiths. According to this vision, it was the “mark of a decent society” that

all people have a stake in shaping the day-to-day circumstances of their community (ODPM 2000: 42). A similar concern for empowering people to influence change was expressed in the government white paper, *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* (DLTR 2001). In it, a foreword by Tony Blair endorsed the people's desire to be heard regarding community services such as street cleaning, housing and leisure facilities. It was claimed that former development strategies had failed because government had not harnessed the knowledge and energy of local people, or empowered them to develop their own solutions to need (SEU 2000: 7). New policy guidance literature spoke of the necessity of engaging the community fully and with appropriate communication channels, so that there could be real opportunity for the exchange of ideas (DLTR 2002: 4). Spending on regeneration programmes increased and area based initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities and Health and Education Action Zones were designed so that public and voluntary sectors would join with communities in tackling disadvantage. A strengthened resolve to attract significant input from the community prompted one civil servant to comment, "We've said for years that the community must be involved, this time we really do mean it" (Docherty et al 2001: 2226).

New Labour's interest in enabling people to participate in improving their neighbourhood was consistent with its broader view that communities had become too reliant upon the state, and that what was needed was a welfare state where opportunity and responsibility went hand in hand (Imrie and Raco 2003: 13). In neighbourhood regeneration the government's framework of participation was interested in the assets and capabilities possessed by local people, as well as the building up of social networks that would enrich the lives of individuals, enable collective action and result in well-connected sustainable communities (Furbey et al 2006: 1). An area based targeting of resources on problem communities saw participation as a form of empowerment that would lift people out of social exclusion and give them the opportunity to influence change through collaborative action (Foley and Martin 2000: 488; Hastings 2003: 94). In 2006 the government published *The Community Development Challenge*, detailing the merits and weaknesses of the community development profession and how its role in neighbourhood regeneration could be supported. The document noted that the short term nature of funding sources, made it hard for community development to achieve a sustained and growing impact. Also the localised aspect of community development and a lack of detailed documentation on outcomes, meant that community development was too low profile and little understood by officials (DCLG 2006: 4). Recommendations included improving the evidence base on community development,

creating a strategic community development approach across local authorities and providing longer term funding.

With community development perspectives now embodied in government policy on neighbourhood regeneration, community development theorists reflected on the new relationship between community development and policy. Henderson (2008: 13) recognised that community development could be seen as having become overly dependant on government support, but argued that the profession has matured in being able to work in partnership with the government. Gilchrist (2004: 18) noted the increased emphasis on partnership working, with individuals encouraged to become community representatives. But she maintained that there was a failure to properly support people in this role or to build up trust with communities before consulting with them. Packham (2008: 39) wrote that the Labour government sought to control the third sector, including community groups, rather than provide adequate support. Some commentators regarded the incorporation of community development principles into social policy as an improvement, but at the same time expressed reservations over the marrying of these themes with government agendas. Dinham (2007: 184) found that the New Deal for Communities gave participants some limited sense of empowerment, but was concerned that the imposition of government delivery targets compromised the Freireian emphasis on local people constructing their own narratives. Smith (1996, 2006) asserted that with the exception of the Sure Start programme, the New Deal for Communities and some tenant management organisations, government sponsored community work had remained “largely locked into the mix of care, economic development and service delivery improvement work that developed during the 1980s and 1990s.” There has been a feeling that British politics has taken some steps towards community empowerment but significant progress is still needed (Zipfel and Gaventa 2007: 86).

At the current time, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat government has revealed three parts to its “Big Society” vision for strengthening civil society: 1) Authority over planning decisions will be devolved to local councils and neighbourhoods, allegedly giving people the power to shape their area, 2) Non-governmental organisations will be given powers to compete for the right to manage public services, 3) People will be encouraged to become more involved in their communities, with the help of the National Citizen Service, community organisers and Community First (Cabinet Office 2010). Scott (2010a: 133-34) comments that as spending cuts lead to a stronger focus on what civil society is able to do, there is greater potential for community development to be involved in enabling community

self-help. In addition, the government's willingness to work with broad based community organisers implies that the community development need not necessarily abandon its radical grounds for belief in empowerment. On the other hand, Scott argues that the recession will discourage voluntary action and reduce community support infrastructure, thus resulting in a loss of community groups (2010b: 6-7).

Principles of participation in community development

Community development theorists advocate a range of principles associated with people participation, which they claim are necessary for neighbourhood regeneration to be effective. These principles help us to understand what community development is, and what is meant by "participation" in this subject. Below I summarise the principles of participation that I found to be common to most community development literature.

1. Participation as social justice

Community development regards the participation of communities in local issues and regeneration as morally imperative and an end in itself. A 2007 workshop which drew from the experience of 45 global proponents of participation announced that, "The starting point for participation is that it should be a right and not just an invitation (Zipfield and Gaventa 2007: 86-7)." The same workshop concluded that the empowerment of communities is important as a process, irrespective of outcome. The Standing Conference for Community Development (SCCD 2001: 5) lists social justice as one of the main values of community development. It includes the moral aim that people should be able to claim their rights, devise ways to meet their needs and have input over decisions that affect their future. Proponents of participation regard it as essential to the well-being of individuals and communities (e.g. Packham 2008: 71), which in itself would constitute a powerful 'justice argument' for enabling participation to take place.

2. Participation as local democracy

Ife (2002: 127-28) maintains that although the scale and complexity of societies necessitates some form of national government, there are obvious problems in these systems that transfer power to an elite whose outlooks may not represent the people. Moreover, traditional types of participation in national politics, such as voting behaviour and contacting political representatives, are in decline (Brodie et al 2009: 8). Participation in local issues can help to ameliorate the effects of these forms of disempowerment. Community development stresses

that participation at the local level must be truly democratic and not dominated by other powers. Writing of the principles that should underpin community involvement, Banks (2003: 19-20) includes the encouragement of individuals and community groups to make choices and chart their own courses of action, and the rejection of “we know best” attitudes from professionals. How far this type of self-determination is possible will depend upon what type of participation one is talking about. Arnstein (1969) famously distinguished between tokenistic participation that consists of professionals informing, consulting or placating communities, and genuine participation that embraces people empowerment through partnership or citizen control. It is widely recognised that the latter is needed for communities to have a credible level of representation. Ife (2002: 133) believes that communities should have control over project management, but Batten (2008: 57) argues that communities do not always know what options are available, so they need to negotiate with partner agencies over action strategies.

3. Participation as capacity building

Henderson (2008: 89, 92) points out that capacity building is now a major component of community development practice. Skinner (1997: 1-2) defines the process of capacity building as:

Development work that strengthens the ability of community organizations and groups to build their structures, systems, people and skills so that they are better able to define and achieve their objectives and engage in consultation and planning, manage community projects and take part in partnerships and community enterprises. It includes aspects of training, organizational and personal development and resource building, organized in a planned and self-conscious manner, reflecting the principles of empowerment and equality.

It is common for community workers to introduce informal learning processes by setting up groups in which residents share experiences and ideas, thereby acquiring basic listening and democratic skills (Packham 2008: ch. 2). Newly formed community activists can be involved in training others to gain necessary the skills, or residents might be shown projects that other communities have created. Capacity building among residents also occurs naturally through the process of working with partners on community issues. Botes and Rensburg (2000: 1, 54-6) warn against development schemes where communities are kept dependent upon

professionals so that they fail to grasp or utilise their own potential and capabilities. Only through the inclusion of appropriate forms of community participation will development in the fullest sense of the word be realised.

4. Participation as confidence building

Strictly speaking there are several interrelated dimensions to confidence building in community development. Beresford and Croft (1993: 1-2, 56-7) write that confidence levels tend to correspond to personal experience. For this reason, people who have been powerless for most of their lives may be lacking in confidence. Confidence building sessions can help people feel positively about themselves and allow them to acquire the self-esteem that they need to speak up and take action. Ledwith (2005: 2) identifies confidence as a linchpin holding together community consciousness and collectivity. When people reflect upon their situations and come together with a desire to make changes, confidence in the collective starts to grow and encourages them to indeed take action. Woodward (2004: 11) agrees that confidence is related to collective activity. As participants realise the progress that they have made in learning to work together, their confidence and ability to take part in regeneration will increase. Another function of community development is to use social action to counter the stigmas that get attached to marginalised people and which undermine confidence and morale. For example, Ife (2007: 105-6) points out that celebrations of local culture can be used to counter the stigmatisation of communities and generate a sense of dignity and self-respect.

5. Participation as consciousness raising

From the writings of Freire and Gramsci comes an emphasis on raising people's consciousness over how their life circumstances are shaped by structures and discourses of oppression – often with institutions such as the media and the educational system are seen as legitimising situations of powerlessness. People need to be able to examine how they are affected by patterns of oppression, in order to be able to work towards bringing about change (Popple 1995: 64). Using techniques influenced by Freire, a community worker might encourage a group to adopt methods of reflecting upon a problem by examining the forces that feed into it. The analysis can then be used to inform what action should be taken to tackle that problem (Packham 2008: 98, 120). The sharing of thoughts and experiences of oppression may lead to collective consciousness and a shared sense of purpose, bringing new opportunities to challenge domination (Ife 2002: 124-5). Narratives and reflections are

important for linking personal experiences to political systems and for casting off dehumanising ideologies. Therefore the empowerment of communities involves listening to people's stories and deriving an analysis that can inform strategies for change (cf. Greenway and Witten 2005: 156). With more moderate pluralist tones, Twelvetrees (2008: 16) suggests that community development enables participants to believe that they have power to achieve change and to gain a political outlook with a better understanding of how society works.

6. Participation as recognition of community assets

Community development involves understanding and respecting the assets already possessed by communities, including local knowledge and presence in the area. Residents are regarded as individuals with important knowledge to impart concerning their needs and capacities. They have much to contribute to development projects and especially decision-making processes (Berner and Philips 2008: 325). Ife (2002: 102, 108) observes that residents have long term experience of life in their community and it is they who can provide information as to the community's needs, problems and strengths. The Standing Conference of Community Development (2001: 5) includes in its list of community development values, the recognition of the skills, knowledge and expertise that all participants bring to the development process.

7. Participation as the valuing of local cultures

Community development attaches importance to local cultures and maintains that practitioners should avoid 'colonialism' or imposing their own set of values upon the communities that they work with. Beresford and Croft (1993: 120-21) advise practitioners to distinguish between their own values and those of the people, or else participants might end up a "stage army" mobilised to fulfil a set of values that are external to their own. And the Community Development Society believes it essential to "Incorporate the diverse interests and cultures of the community in the community development process (CDS 2010)." Ife (2007: 105, 113-14, 151-54) believes that local cultures are eroded when community workers consciously or subconsciously introduce their own values, protocols, agendas or cultural beliefs. Successful community development depends upon the worker being able to work with the indigenous culture and not assume superiority over it. Development projects must take into account community traditions, such as ways of discussing or debating issues that local people are traditionally used to. Local culture can be used to foster a sense of common identity around which collective action can be built.

8. *Participation as networking*

At the most basic level, networks made up of social contacts between residents provide support that residents can accrue from their relations with other people, since an advantage of community development is that participation in regeneration can increase and strengthen these social contacts (Twelvetreets 2008: 8, 15). But networking also involves cooperating with various bodies inside and outside the community. Gilchrist (2004: 25-8) points out that community development includes helping participants to work effectively with different social groups, as well as with local agencies and sectors such as the voluntary and public sectors. This involves learning how to use existing social networks, building new networks, using communication skills and finding ways to negotiate tensions and differences of opinion that arise. Henderson (2008: 13) makes reference to the strong emphasis on partnership working between community, voluntary and public organisations that is a feature of modern community development. Ife (2002: 250-1) warns that although networking is important as a strategy for change, there is the danger of forming an elite of authorities and institutions that dominate the process and disempower ordinary people. A way to avoid this happening is to ensure that residents are truly incorporated and supported to create their own networks.

The debate surrounding community participation

Problems with participation

The growing popularity of participation among policy makers has prompted challenges from commentators who point out the difficulties associated with that way of working. Some analysts examine the commonly expressed ideology of empowering communities and find it too simplistic an idea in itself to work with. Their point is that ‘community’ tends to be seen as a single entity when in reality, communities are comprised of different social groups distinguishable by age, race and ethnicity, and with competing and conflicting interests. There is the danger that by encouraging communities to act in their own self-interests, the process of ‘development’ that occurs will be one in which initiatives get the go-ahead on the basis of proving popular with a large or influential group of people, but which ends up disadvantaging minorities by increasing competition and power imbalances between interest groups (Burton 2004: 193; Barr 1995: 123). There seems to be no guarantee that individuals from all segments of the community will make themselves available so that participation can be fully representative. Rather, there are long-standing concerns that the more vociferous individuals in a community will tend to have more influence than is warranted (Burton 2004:

193). Even those who speak in favour of participation know that it is hard to get all sectors of a community involved. Beresford and Croft (1993: 16) admit that what are called “community representatives” may not be representative of everyone. Banks (2003: 39) recognises the problem posed by differences among the community, pointing out that minority or dissenting views must be supported in discussions.

Brent (2009: 237) mentions an example of social exclusion that occurred in a radio station project set up for teenagers. The project attracted the interest of young people from further afield, but they soon found themselves kept on the periphery by local youths who took ownership of it. Brent also notices how art projects aimed at community expression can omit to represent the experiences of minorities such as migrants to the area (ibid: 118). Meanwhile, an insight into how dominant groups may use participatory processes to serve their own ends has been provided by Mosse (2002), whose case study concerned a programme to improve the agricultural systems of a region of India. Among local people the farmers comprised the most influential group, and they used their consensus that soil erosion was a key issue to be tackled, to gain wage labour constructing drainage in the period following the harvest. Mosse argues that in this way the local hierarchy mediated the goals of the project, with the result that aims were manipulated to serve one social group while other important needs and opportunities were missed.

Visionary notions that the building of confidence and self-esteem are necessary to human well-being and the individual’s ability to participate have been questioned. It is counter-claimed that clear definitions and evidence surrounding the ‘benefits’ of confidence building are lacking. It is even argued that these ideas actually undermine belief in human capacity, by espousing a therapeutic view of humans as emotionally vulnerable and dependent upon the work of institutions such as SureStart centres and mentoring organisations (Ecclestone 2004: 15-6). Furedi (2003: 196) contends that it difficult to reconcile the idea of individuals being dependent upon institutions for feelings of personal worth, with them also being able to exercise their participatory rights by challenging those authorities over certain issues.

Another line of criticism questions assumptions that are made over the capacity of communities to tackle problems. Botterill and Fisher (2002) ask whether communities have the necessary resources, knowledge and skills to solve a range of problems such as dysfunctional families, substance abuse and crime, or to bring sudden prosperity to a socially and economically depressed area. The authors draw from the Australian Landcare programme that attempted to address land degradation and the decline of wildlife through collective action. Low numbers of skilled leaders in some areas, as well as the tendency for

leadership positions to be taken up by busiest people in the community, were found to be limiting factors (Campbell 1994: 267). The authors find that the latter point coheres well with Marwell and Oliver's (1993: 2) observation that community action is normally derived from a hard core of motivated and resourceful people, rather than the average individual. There was also evidence that communities sometimes have insufficient resources to tackle issues, as reflected in the farmers' protest that, "You can't be green when you are in the red" (Botterill and Fisher 2002: 9). The Landcare programme demonstrated that the impact of collective action is constrained by finite levels of capacity within the community. Botterill and Fisher advocate a position of reasoned thinking that considers the limitations and appropriateness of participation as a solution to issues, as opposed to "magical thinking" – the conviction that communities possess extraordinary to tackle otherwise insurmountable problems.

A parallel finding is revealed in a British research project which compared perceptions of resident led regeneration schemes held by policy-makers and community representatives (Foley and Martin 2000). Questionnaires were administered to a sample of central government policy-makers and some community representatives who had experience as local activists. Both groups understood that there were limitations with regard to what skills and resources were available for community representatives to work with. But the policy-makers did not display as strong a realisation of limitations as the community representatives did. In addition, community representatives identified apathy among the community as an obstacle to participatory approaches, whereas none of the policy-makers saw that particular problem. These results suggest that policy-makers who extol participatory principles may have insufficient awareness of factors which place limits on community capacity. In particular, participation does not come naturally to many people because it is contrary to the patterns of socialisation and experiences of powerlessness that most individuals have grown used to. Capacity and confidence building sessions may help with the above problems but those stages are both time consuming and expensive (cf. Berner and Philips 2008: 325-26).

Those who advocate community participation may be unable to ensure that a participatory scheme is not manipulated by its managers. There are reports of development professionals displaying paternalistic attitudes towards the community, while efforts to engage with residents seemed tokenistic and lacking in serious commitment. Botes and Rensburg, in their study of development in South Africa, note that the majority of projects are initiated and managed from outside the target area and are not launched by the community itself (2000: 42-43). They paint an unflattering portrait of development professionals as figures who all

too often disempower communities by assuming that they themselves hold the superior outlook:

The trademark of ‘development experts’ is often that they know best and therefore, their prime function is to transfer knowledge to communities whom by definition ‘know less’. The reason for this is that professionals are predominantly trained in ways that disempower and who tell other people what they should do or think. This has contributed to professionals (unconsciously or consciously) regarding themselves as the sole owner of development wisdom and having the monopoly of solutions which consistently under-rate and under-value the capacities of local people to make their own decisions as well as to determine their own priorities (2000: 43).

If community workers are employed by the above kinds of authorities, they may be given little scope to empower communities as they would like. Batten (2008: 57-61) notes that partnerships between residents and local agencies are not naturally empowering, due to the prescriptive nature of most agencies. Agencies do not ordinarily have an empowerment agenda and rarely seem to evaluate their approach to the public to see what lessons might be learned. Moreover, if a regeneration scheme comes tied to government delivery targets, it may prove impossible to secure the right level of community participation or positive outcomes for people’s lives.

Morrison (2003) discusses the disempowerment of local people at the hands of professionals in a SRB scheme in Blackbird Leys, Oxford. The community lacked the knowledge to submit a funding bid, so an official who lived outside of the housing estate took charge of the application. Important details concerning the bid were not always passed on to the community, and when information such as SRB guidelines did get handed down, the content was verbalised in such a way as to be unfathomable by ordinary people. For Morrison, the under-valuing of local skills and knowledge could be discerned in the differential between the high salaries of professional facilitators of the scheme and the unpaid labour of voluntary workers living on the estate. Morrison reacts to a statement by one professional who said that working with local residents involved “a lot of hand-holding”, by commenting on the need instead for residents to be teaching professionals about local problems and solutions that could be implemented (Morrison in Imrie and Raco 2003: 156).

It is also argued that community participation carries a range of risks. Participation can be seen as a tax on the community in that it requires efforts to be made on top of the daily labour of life. Participation may be especially burdensome for women due to the greater tendency for women to act as primary caregiver in the family and to get involved in community groups (Ife 2002: 11). Residents might take on the stress and anxiety of community projects, or they may suffer feelings of deflation when a project fails to live up to expectations (Beresford and Croft 1993: 52-3). Projects may undermine the wellbeing of the participants if bureaucratic red tape becomes obstructive and leads to frustration (cf. Dinham 2007: 184). Banks (2003: 31) makes reference to the phenomenon of ‘regeneration fatigue’ – a symptom arising from community involvement in successive regeneration schemes. In addition, residents need to be wary of being co-opted into projects that the community itself would not have chosen to do. And as in the 1960s Community Development Projects, programmes might give the appearance that social problems are traceable to the residents, when really they are caused by external forces such as government economic policies.

The case in favour of participation

Some research offers findings to suggest that participation can work, particularly when empowerment at the grassroots level is genuinely implemented. Docherty et al (2001) use evidence obtained from neighbourhoods in Edinburgh and Glasgow to argue that efforts to increase participation are not wasted. Two of the neighbourhoods, Dalside and Westfields, shared characteristics of deprivation, including unemployment, a high proportion of low skilled occupations and poor quality housing – in contrast with Lochart and Leafly where there was generally less disadvantage. Dalside was found to have extensive opportunity structures for the community to get involved in local regeneration. A management board consisted of city Councillors and elected community representatives, with the purpose of distributing funds from an EU anti-poverty grant. The board further supported participation by setting up projects to strengthen community resources, and by administering the funding of a partnership consisting of figures from the community and other sectors who worked on neighbourhood improvement strategies. Dalside also benefitted from a community alliance that coordinated the work of community and voluntary groups. There were efforts to support participation at Westfields too, but focus groups had found residents uncertain that they could be involved or have much influence over the agencies responsible for the regeneration work (2001: 2235-36).

The researchers constructed measures of civic attitudes based on questions asking, for example, whether residents would be happy to work alongside others to improve their area. A quantitative analysis revealed that of the two disadvantaged neighbourhoods, Dalside scored highly relative to Westfields in terms of residents' willingness to be involved in community action. Dalside residents also gave answers that demonstrated greater trust in local government and community agencies. This led the research team to suggest that participatory structures in Dalside had fostered some belief in community participation, due to residents having seen improvements to their neighbourhood springing from previous engagement in regeneration. The researchers went on to say that in the absence of participatory structures, development schemes might exacerbate the sense of alienation from local governance that is often felt in areas of deprivation (2001: 2244-46).

Brent (2009: 237) recollects from his experience of community work, some positive outcomes to arise from community action. He writes that the involvement of residents in regeneration projects does have the potential to bring significant change:

One of the more cynical views of community action is that it changes virtually nothing, and that the basic asymmetries of power remain unaffected. Southmead remains a poor place. However, the actions of just a few hundred people cause changes that should not be undervalued. The public devastation of drug use locally was reduced, even if the power of the international drug trade was scarcely dented. There was better provision for young people, provided in new ways. New representations of Southmead have arisen. Small havens have been built even if heaven has not been achieved (2009: 200-1).

Burns et al (2004: 28, 81) argue that community self-help reinforces community values by causing people to connect actions with outcomes. When people do things to improve their neighbourhood, their attention is fixed on the implications of their actions; but when people depend on outside agencies to handle local problems, there is little reason to reflect on how their own behaviour is either helpful or harmful to the community. Burns et al also argue that self-help can be a route into employment. They cite a study which found that 5% of volunteers had gained employment through joining a LETS scheme (Williams et al 2001). This was mainly because the volunteers had learned administrative skills which helped them to apply for jobs. However, 24% of the volunteers had learned skills such as information technology, which increased their employability. Other types of community participation

might similarly impart employability skills, for example if participants learn how to take the minutes of meetings or to use computer technology to produce posters and flyers. Minton (2007: 69) finds that residents' local knowledge makes a valuable contribution to the management of community services. In one area where residents became involved with managing local services, they discovered that money had been allocated to cleaning a playground that had been removed eight years ago, as well as emptying dog litter bins which had never existed.

Some commentators suggest that the sense of self-esteem that can be imparted to stigmatised communities has value. Although Morrison finds fault with the SRB scheme that she observed in Blackbird Leys, she sees evidence of participation being used in such a way as to dignify the local population. A female resident involved with the scheme explained:

The system has for a long time put people like us down... They've told us we're useless, we're worthless, we're liars, we're cheats, we're layabouts, we're lazy and this that and the other. And then you say that to someone often enough and they believe it... We're trying to teach people that they do have value, they are worthwhile, and what they've got to say is really, really, really worth listening to (Morrison in Imrie and Raco 2003: 156).

Many other studies of neighbourhood development mention that residents acquired a sense of inclusion and empowerment after getting involved with processes of neighbourhood regeneration (e.g. Hughes and Carmichael 1998: 222; Dobbs and Moore 2002: 168-69). Greenaway and Witten (2005: 151-5) analysed ten community projects in New Zealand which had utilised a variety of reflective methods such as evaluations of project designs. In three projects that had been with Maori communities, reflections involved stories of white colonisation and how this left the indigenous people feeling powerless and alienated from their cultural assets. Ways of dealing with these effects could then be considered. It was found that in each of the projects, participants had acquired skills that were transferrable to other initiatives. Against the earlier mentioned claims that a focus on raising confidence and self-esteem undermines belief in human capacity, it could be argued that confidence such empowerment leaves communities in a stronger position and with greater capacity to exercise control over their future.

Some research offers examples of participation in organisational structures that differ from community development projects at the neighbourhood level. But the positive

outcomes in these examples are attributed to the implementation of democratic values and interactions between participants – elements that can be ingredients of grassroots participatory projects. Majee and Hort (2010: 422-27) report on their study of a North American worker cooperative that provides a homecare service. Their analysis of data from interviews, surveys and articles on the cooperative, found that participation and empowerment snowballed among the cooperative members. Training sessions and interactions between members had fostered their relational and business skills, as well as self-confidence and optimism, which had in turn led to increased participation and a willingness to take on leadership roles. Two factors accounting for the success of the cooperative were a fully democratic management board that taught all members to own and control the business, and the flow of information letting members know about opportunities to participate and be involved in democratic processes.

Ashworth (2000) writes of changes that she saw as Project Coordinator of the Nottingham Council Partnership – a position which required her to manage a partnership consisting of thousands of members from the resident, voluntary, public and business sectors to manage a multi-million pound regeneration programme. Early obstacles included doubts among residents that they would have any real influence, in the wake of earlier schemes which had spoken of empowerment without providing it. The decision of the steering group was to invest in structures that would facilitate genuine power sharing so that whatever the outcome, the climate of scepticism would not be made worse. Three residents' forums were established, representing three geographically defined communities contained within the target area. The residents' forums were populated through door-knocking and the visiting of public focal points such as community organisations and pubs. The voluntary, business, and public sectors were also given a forum each, and a seventh forum represented the city council. Each of the forums were asked to identify priority actions and appoint representatives to take their proposals to the Partnership Council Board. The written constitution ensured that decisions could go through only by consensus and collaboration, and this principle was reinforced through team building exercises (2000: 256-58).

Representatives were surprised to find that they shared much common ground. For example residents found that their outlook regarding local problems and solutions was largely similar to that of voluntary and public sector workers. An action plan emerged out of the consensus of more than 800 people, and working groups made up of individuals brought together from the different forums defined the specifications of each part of the plan. New projects to materialise under the action plan included a mediation service for neighbourhood

disputes and a restorative justice programme. Ashworth writes that although some elements of the democratic process were hard to manage, and that not all scepticism could be removed from the minds of some locals, it *had* been possible for hundreds of people from different sectors to work together in establishing priorities and reducing fear and suspicion of each other (2000: 258-59). The overall project suggests that it is possible to bring local knowledge and skills into contact with professional expertise without disempowering the residents.

The city of Porto Alegre in Brazil offers what might be considered a supreme example of empowerment through participation. Since the municipal election of a left wing coalition in 1988, the city budget has been a bottom-up process in which budgetary allocations are determined by tens of thousands of residents. A pyramid system of councils at the neighbourhood and district levels allows communities in all parts of the city to define their own priorities for spending, with the outcome that the Porto Alegre budget is effectively prioritised towards the needs of the poor. Gret and Sintomer (2005: 75-83) point out that although only a percentage of the 1.3 million city inhabitants have participated in the budget, the situation is still very different to one where decisions are made by a just few dozen city Councillors. Moreover, traditionally dominated social groups such as women, young people and the unemployed have been empowered to address their particular needs, since large numbers of them turn up to speak at the neighbourhood councils. In addition, the method of using communities to define local needs has increased the range of public services that are now available (Heller 2001: 140). Some of the factors that have helped the budgetary system at Porto Alegre to succeed are not true for Britain. These include the extent of deprivation in Brazil and the power of the Mayor to hand pick large numbers of officials to ensure that administration of the budget is completed (Gret and Sintomer 2005: 20-21, 70-72). Yet, Ashworth's (2000) example of the Nottingham Partnership Council suggests that it is at least possible to set up structures in Britain which allow hundreds of people to contribute ideas to a decision-making process.

The principles of participation listed earlier can be treated as counter-arguments to criticisms of the participatory approach. For example, there is the social justice argument that community participation is a moral end in itself. On this basis Beresford and Croft (1993: 19, 52, 119) point out that although it is difficult to find representatives for the whole community, the alternative prospect that local decisions be deferred to a handful of bureaucrats outside of the community, is hardly desirable either. The principle of capacity building constitutes a counter-argument to objections over the cost of supporting community participation, by representing the fact that if communities develop skills and strategies to

improve their neighbourhoods, then additional resources have been generated. And the principle of valuing community assets reminds us that resources are wasted when not directed towards real needs because no-one sought the local knowledge of residents. In answer to the objection that participation places a burden upon the people, it can be argued that the personal fulfilment associated with participation can be a very rewarding use of time.

Conclusion

Community development began to emerge as distinct field in the 1950s, with a vision for empowering residents to participate in local issues and neighbourhood regeneration. It is possible to identify eight community development principles of participation which elaborate on what community development is and what is meant by “participation”. These principles are: 1) Participation as social justice, 2) Participation as local democracy, 3) Participation as capacity building, 4) Participation as confidence building, 5) Participation as recognition of community assets, 6) Participation as consciousness raising, 7) Participation as respect for local cultures, 8) Participation as networking. In recent years some of this participatory approach has been incorporated into areas of government policy. Positive and negative analyses inform the discussion surrounding participation, and it is apparent that the approach is vulnerable to certain pitfalls. Weaknesses include the problem of finding participants to represent different sectors of the community, risks that participation will be tokenistic rather than actual, limits on community capacity and concerns over the amount of effort demanded from communities.

However, there are case studies which indicate that participation can work. The concern that communities lack the skills and resources to improve their area is answered by evidence suggesting that communities have much to contribute. The issue that professionals will be unwilling to share power with ordinary people is counter-balanced by examples of healthy partnerships being formed. There are reports of community participation having positive effects in deprived areas, as well as evidence that participation has increased the confidence and skills of those involved. The cases of the Nottingham Community Council Project and the Porto Alegre municipal budget provide evidence that the local knowledge possessed by grassroots people can be put to good use. Some of the studies of successful participation mentioned earlier have themes in common, in that they attribute the success to genuine democratic involvement, listening and enabling (Docherty et al 2001; Ashworth 2000; Gret and Sintomer 2005; Majee and Hort 2010). Several of them also say that positive

experiences of participation have led to a willingness to be involved in further public activity (Docherty et al 2001; Gret and Sintomer 2005; Majee and Hort 2010).

A further consideration is that top-down styles of management may lead to similar problems to those associated with grassroots approaches. On the issue of representativeness, it is unclear whether professionals or bureaucrats can make decisions that are representative of a whole community any better than the residents could have done. Both top-down and grassroots approaches might be manipulated to serve aims that differ from the goals of the project. Apathy among the community can be an obstacle to the participation of residents, but apathy among professionals can cause them to be disinterested in issues that ordinary people care about. Community participation may place some burden on communities, but schemes in which the concerns of local people go unaddressed do not alleviate existing burdens. The facilitation of community participation might be a costly process, but spending resources on perceived needs rather than real needs identified by residents can mean that future expenditure is needed.

It can also be maintained that certain positive outcomes are achievable *only* when community participation is included. The personal growth that occurs when people gain in confidence, self-esteem, skills and employability comes via the participatory approach; it cannot occur when regeneration schemes are prescriptive and local people have no input. Arguably only the participatory approach can tackle the stigmatisation of an area by generating pride in projects where residents make a meaningful contribution. Only the participatory approach enables local knowledge, skills and resources to be combined with professional expertise. And only the participatory approach delivers the moral objective of giving people influence over decisions that affect the future of their community. In the final analysis, it seems that both top-down management and participation have their difficulties. But when it works well, participation can do bring practical and moral benefits. Steps can be taken to control for errors such as putting too much pressure on communities (community development practitioners themselves write of the need for such controls). Participation would seem a desirable regeneration strategy, provided that it is implemented with awareness of the potential pitfalls and with measures in place to minimise those problems.

2. Theologies of empowerment

Any prospect that churches can adopt the participatory principles of community development depends upon there being a theological basis for doing so. That is, it would be unrealistic to encourage churches to promote community participation if no motivating theological reasons could be found. This chapter looks at liberation theology and urban theology which treat the empowerment of communities as a central aspect of the Christian mission. The two theologies provide evidence that a theological case for a participatory approach can be constructed. They also offer examples of faith-driven participation, which are helpful for answering the question of whether churches can transform their traditional ways of working in order to incorporate a community development approach, and whether there can be positive outcomes from that change. Arguments for and against these theologies are considered in order to test how far their outlooks and actions could be accepted by British churches today.

Liberation theology

Background to liberation theology

Liberation theology emerged in Latin America in the mid twentieth century, as a Christian response to extremes of deprivation and the marginalisation of peoples in countries across that continent. Prominent liberation theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (1987: 67) give an overview of the background factors that contributed to the formation of liberation theology. Latin American governments of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the governments of Peron in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil, promoted moods of nationalistic feeling accompanied by increases in industrial development that aimed to produce goods locally instead of importing them. The resulting economic change benefitted the middle class and some of the working class of the cities, but had the effect of marginalising great swathes of the rural and peasant population. The upsurge of capitalism led to the formation of socialist counter-movements, which in turn gave rise to repressive military dictatorships seeking to protect capitalist interests. Within the Roman Catholic Church there followed a wave of compassion over the sufferings of the people, with Catholic organisations such as the Young Christian Agriculturalists actively working to improve the situations of the poor. At the same time, the first ecclesial base communities began to form. These groups consisted of working class and peasant families organised around a pastor or lay worker for collective Bible study

and worship. Consequently their name derived from the fact that members were at the “base” of the social class system (Boff 1985: 125). They originated as outreach missions to the populations of remote or shantytown areas, where religious observation was low and church attendance was inadequate as a means of reaching the inhabitants (Berryman 1987: 64-8).

Increasing dissatisfaction with the way that Latin America remained dependent upon faster developing Western nations resulted in a flow of Marxist thought that blamed the unequal exchanges of global capitalism for deprivations in under-developed countries, and looked to government models other than existing right wing regimes to break that dependency (Berryman 1987: 6-7). Soon it would be realised that the ecclesial base communities had potential in the field of community action. Unlike the traditional church with its rigid hierarchy, base communities in countries such as Brazil, Nicaragua and El Salvador, could provide the ordinary poor with opportunities to act collectively in developing self-help solutions to their needs, as well as pressing for political change (Sigmund 1990: 9). This independent revolutionary characteristic presented an obvious challenge to the centralised authority of the dominant Roman Catholic Church. But according to the Boffs, the Second Vatican Council had created an atmosphere of creative theological freedom, encouraging Catholic and Protestant thinkers alike to reflect on how faith, poverty and social justice might be positioned in relation to each other (McGovern 1993: 7-8). This, and the Second Vatican Council’s own reforms, together with an acute shortage of priests to minister to people, seemed to mitigate any controversy surrounding the populist participatory activities of the base communities (Sigmund 1990: 9).

By the 1960s a distinctive theology of liberation was quickly beginning to take shape. Calls for a Christian view of history that would unlock the root causes of poverty and encompass a theology of social action, reached a head in the 1968 CELAM conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin. The final document of the conference contains statements critical of Latin American governments and their economies, attacking the inequality between social classes generated by liberal capitalism and the exercise of authority that acts against the common good (*Documentos finales de Medellin* 1972 cited by Kirk 1979: 28). In summarising the document, Kirk observes that:

It makes a strong appeal for a new just social order in which man, particularly the popular classes, fully participating in the process of government, may be the subject of his history and not the arbitrary object of speculation and ‘profit without end’,

and also for the defence of the poor by means of grass-roots organisations which would fight for their rights.

The Bishops declared that God had sent his Son in order to liberate people from oppression, as well as slavery to sin, hunger, misery and ignorance. They pledged the support of the church in enabling oppressed people of all social backgrounds to realise and make use of their rights (McGovern 1993: 9). Two years later, the first books presenting a liberation theology analysis appeared, to be followed in 1971 by Gutierrez's pioneering work, *A Theology of Liberation* (1973). This publication played a major role in introducing other continents to liberation theology (McGovern 1993: 7).

Shortly afterward the Vatican expressed criticism over most elements of liberation theology, although approving of the basic aim to alleviate poverty. In his speech at the 1979 CELAM conference at Puebla, Pope John Paul II warned against politicisations of the scriptures, stating that the portrait of Christ as a political revolutionary was at odds with the catechism of the church (Tombs 2002: 194). Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, was another critic. Ratzinger continued the Vatican's strategy of undermining the liberation theology movement by appointing conservative bishops in Latin America. Despite this, liberation theology's leading spokesmen do not appear to have abandoned their principles. When the Vatican recently imposed sanctions on liberation theologians Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino, another long-time liberation theologian, Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga of Brazil, responded with an open letter to the church, calling for a reaffirmation of its commitment to the poor and the link between faith and politics to be maintained (Rother 2007).

Tenets of liberation theology

Any overview of the tenets of liberation theology should begin with its view that God is especially concerned over the plight of the poor and that the faithful must adhere to the same "preferential option for the poor" (Sigmund 1990: 7). Other beliefs are orientated around this basic faith position. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (1987: 44-6) list some motivations explaining why they believe that the preference for the poor should be upheld by the church. The "theological motivation" appeals to the character of the Deity, drawing from scriptures that represent God as the "author and sustainer of life" who rescues the oppressed, while commanding his people to seek justice and help the poor as acts of worship. The "Christological motivation" appeals to the nature of Christ, with reference to scriptures

indicating that Christ's mission was prioritised towards the poor and that they were the main recipients of his message. The "Apostolic motivation" appeals to the Apostles of the early church who pooled their resources so that there would be no poor among them and insisted that the poor must not be overlooked. The "ecclesiological motivation" appeals to the declaration of the Latin American church to commit itself to the poor, as announced at the 1968 Medellin Conference.

Integral to liberation theology is the view that the church must promote the liberation of poor and marginalised people – an outlook which fuses religious belief with the social sciences and especially Marxist ideas. Social sciences such as history, economics and Marxist philosophy are employed to analyse structural causes of poverty, while theology is directed at finding out ways to aid liberation in accordance with God's plan for the poor. In this framework the Old Testament Book of Exodus is considered to offer a paradigm of liberation. It narrates the account of a liberating God who, in a political act, leads the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt so that they can construct a new society based on principles of social justice. Their journey is also a religious one in that they are rescued in order to become a holy nation. And so God is understood to be the "God of political liberation" and a powerful actor in human affairs who battles against the 'Pharaohs' of this world whenever they stamp their will upon the weak (Gutierrez 1973: 88-89). The Bible is read by liberation theologians from the perspective of those who are oppressed, meaning that certain scriptures become very meaningful from a political viewpoint. These include the prophets of the Old Testament for their condemnation of oppression and their defence of powerless and vulnerable members of society (Boff and Boff 1987: 32-3). Classic quotes are from the prophet Isaiah:

Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 10:17).

Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (Isaiah 58: 6).

Reminiscent of the Hebrew prophets, liberation theologians such as Juan Segundo and Gustavo Gutierrez have perceived the protest of the Latin American Church as a case of

prophecy in the modern world and argue that the church should go further in denouncing subhuman treatment on a global scale (Kirk 1979: 29).

Other influential texts are the Gospels for their depictions of Christ and the kingdom of God. In them, Christ is seen to bring liberation through his death and resurrection, which frees people of everything that would bar their access to the kingdom. The kingdom represents the “full and total liberation of all creation, in the end, purified of all that oppresses it” (Boff and Boff 1987: 52-5). Important then, is the promise of that liberation which is given to the poor. In the Gospel of Luke, turning towards his disciples, Christ says, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20).” The inauguration of the kingdom of God is seen as a future event but also something that can be present in principle whenever people practice social justice and the empowerment of the poor. Sigmund (1990: 7) points out that the very title “liberation theology” comes from Christ’s own summary of his mission which, according to the New Testament, happens to encompass themes of emancipation:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour (Luke 4:11-12).

Obviously liberation theologians are interested in the political connotations of that description in addition to its spiritual meaning. For them, Christ went on to demonstrate by his confrontations with the religio-political authorities of the day, that there need be no contradiction between Christian love and opposing the sin that exists in oppressive social and political systems of the world (Boff and Boff 1987: 62).

Liberation theology features a distinctive set of opinions on how the church should engage with the poor and their liberation, taking the view that the poor must be supported to become their own liberators. To merely distribute charitable aid will serve to create a similar sort of dependency to the one already found in capitalism’s relationship between the proletariat and the ruling class. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff say of aid agencies:

However perceptive they become and however well-intentioned – and successful – aid remains a strategy for helping the poor, but treating them as (collective) objects of charity, not as subjects of their own liberation...

There is a failure to see that the poor are oppressed and made poor by others, and what they do possess – strength to resist, capacity to understand their rights, to organise themselves and transform from a subhuman situation – tends to be left out of the account (1987: 4-5).

Therefore liberation theologians emphasise solidarity with the poor rather than the handing down of aid in a paternalistic fashion, believing that the poor must be supported to become agents of their own liberation. This belief in the self-liberation of the poor has parallels with Marxist ideals of the labouring masses rising up and transforming the structure of society. In Marxist philosophy self-liberation requires the oppressed to grasp the reality of their situation, and likewise liberation theology calls upon the poor to awaken to their exploitation and pledges to support them in their campaigns for justice (Gutierrez 1973: 63). But liberation theology also embraces the special status of the poor in a way that stands independently of Marx. It is again traceable to the Christian scriptures where, for example, simple fishermen become the first apostles and change the world by planting the earliest Christian communities (Hebblethwaite 1993: 93). The preferential option for the poor consists not only of compassion, but a belief that the poor are privileged as agents with power to change the course of history and expand the Christian faith through the ecclesial base communities. Liberation theologians therefore believe that the church must join with and accompany the poor in their journeys (Boff 1985: 10-11). They have been strongly motivated to impart a sense of dignity and efficaciousness to marginalised peoples (cf. Sigmund 1990: 195).

The vision held by liberation theologians is that both their theology and the church itself might build upwards from the circumstances of the poor. Segundo (1977: 7-8) argues that liberation theology differs from other theologies, because it treats theology as something embedded in social situations and therefore begins with the experiences of the oppressed. Through the solidarity that is shown by engaging with the poor, the student gains experience of poverty and oppression which can be used to elucidate what the scriptures have to say on these subjects. The insights gained prompt social action which in turn contributes a new experience for theological reflection. This “praxis” or practical application of theology stresses the need to listen to the poor, as they are the ones who know the most about their life situations. Liberation theologians make some criticism of classical versions of Christianity for their preoccupation with internal religion, naivety over the historical and political causes of poverty, and inept sense of God at work in processes of liberation (Sigmund 1990: 55).

The institutional church is challenged by Leonardo Boff over its top-down leadership style which withholds from the common people the chance to participate in decision-making. Boff contends that the centralised power and hierarchy of the traditional church is an historical import from the authority structures of the Greco-Roman world, and in Marxist terms accuses church leaders of expropriating the 'religious means of production' from the people (1985: 8-11, 32-53, 67-8). He propositions that a new church be allowed to evolve out of the ecclesial base communities by the power of the Holy Spirit, while maintaining that church leaders have the role of ministering within communities but not above them (1997: 23-33).

The influence of liberation theology in Britain

A search for relevant literature suggests that there is not a prominent liberation theology movement in Britain. Instead, middle class writers on the topic of church and social action have picked out some basic points in the theology that could be adopted by British churches. Here follows a sample of British publications with a liberation theology influence that have been produced over the years.

In 1978 a British edition of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by the Canadian theologian Ronald Sider was published, with revisions from the Shaftesbury Project and a foreword by the popular Evangelical Anglican David Watson (1933-1984). This work introduced Protestant Christians in Britain to a liberation theology view of the poor in its attempt to shock the church into taking action over global poverty. Sider's theological discussion of the poor begins with the question, "Is God biased in favour of the poor?" (1978: 53). He notes that the scriptures never state that God loves the poor more than he does the rich; neither do they make any claim made that God perceives people of a particular social background to be "class enemies". Instead the scriptures iterate many times that God raises up the poor and humble, while casting down people whose power or wealth has come through exploitation or neglect of the poor (1978: 61). Ways in which Sider believes God exercises a special concern for the poor are thought provoking. There is his idea that God identifies with the poor, as suggested by verses which indicate that however the poor get treated is tantamount to treating the Deity in the same way.⁷ But the ultimate identification with the poor is represented by the Incarnation in which Christ is born into poverty to minister on earth (Sider 1978: 61). Sider presents a liberation theology view when he says that God uses the poor as his special instruments. This pattern appears in the Old Testament

⁷ For Sider, this point is conveyed in scripture both positively and negatively where we are told that, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD" (Proverbs 14:31) but, "He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker" (Proverbs 19:17) (1978: 61).

where God calls a race of Hebrew slaves to be his chosen people, and the parallel event in the New Testament when Christ selects disciples of low social status to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. In Sider's view it is not that the 'well off' never get chosen, but that God often enlists the poor to carry out the most important duties, whereas the human tendency is to look to the rich and powerful to effect change. God recognises the value of poor people which human societies tend to ignore (Sider 1978: 64).

Another voice has been David Sheppard (1929-2005) who became Anglican Bishop of Woolwich in 1969 and Bishop of Liverpool in 1975. As one who lived and worked in central London for twenty years, Sheppard's *Bias to the Poor* (1982) interprets his experience of church and the lives of inner city people using liberation theology as one of his guides. Therefore it is not surprising to find that two points in the analysis are that churches should do more to empower the poor and oppose social injustice. The poor in Britain are perceived by Sheppard to be those suffering from relative poverty. They are the ones unable to afford extras such as birthday parties for the children, and who worry that their money may not last the week. Sheppard notes from Holman (1973: 434) that welfare dependency can lead to feelings of shame (1982: 176). Following the lead of liberation theologians he builds one of his arguments around the concept of the kingdom of God representing the end of oppression for all creation. The character of this kingdom reveals that God is concerned with matters of social justice, which in itself constitutes a powerful motive for the church to take a stand on political issues. Christians are told in the Gospels to pray for God's kingdom to come and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The more that churches focus upon this eschatological hope, the clearer it becomes that they must respond to present conditions of poverty and injustice that are contrary to the purpose of the kingdom (1982: 39-40).

Sheppard argues that like Christ, the Christian churches should want the kingdom to come into everybody's situation (1982: 41). But working class people find it hard to connect with the idea that Christ and the kingdom are for them, when they are not listened to by the churches. According to Sheppard, Christianity shares with Marxism a belief that all human beings possess abilities which, by human nature, they will want to use for the good of their community (1982: 151). The issue seems to be whether ecclesiastical structures, like other structures of society, will go on denying people the dignity of having full and meaningful participation.

Ann Morisy has many years of experience working with churches that interact with their communities, and wrote her book *Beyond the Good Samaritan* (2003) as ministry advisor to the London Diocese. It includes liberation theology perspectives in one or two places.

Morisy quotes Freire's (1972) view that when the dominant class join the oppressed in their battle for liberation, they fall into the mistake of practising a type of generosity that can be "as harmful as that of the oppressors". The point is that when the dominant class adopt the role of 'helper', there is a likelihood that they will lack confidence in the poor to make decisions for themselves. Although they may genuinely desire to change unjust social systems, their class background causes them to disempower the poor by positioning themselves as the agents of that change. Morisy writes of a visit by some Brazilian Christians to church homeless projects in London. The visitors expressed their surprise at the way the homeless were treated as welfare recipients instead of partners. They explained that Brazilian projects support homeless people to gain confidence in their abilities and to voice their opinion. In their country, churches collaborate with the homeless in organising festivals aimed at winning public support over issues of homelessness, ahead of campaigns to change unhelpful policies (2003: 72). Applying a similar self-help approach to Britain, Morisy suggests that concerts could be organised to raise funds for the homeless, with homeless people themselves performing as the musicians.

In 2008 a resource pack for churches was produced by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster's Justice and Peace Commission, in collaboration with the Diocese of London and the London Church Group for Social Action. Called *No Hands But Ours* (Kentish et al 2008), it aims to educate churches on the subjects of justice and peace, and contains a booklet full of information and ideas for churches that wish to become active in those fields. It also features a video documentary of grassroots work in areas such as homelessness, drug addictions and Fair Trade. In the booklet some themes of liberation theology have been given a place. This is evident where the text makes a series of points about the proclamation of the kingdom of God. The text exhorts churches to reflect on the character of the kingdom, in which power is used for healing and releasing people from burdens, as well as delivering them from personal and structural sin. The reference to "structural sin" connects with the liberation theology view that sin is found in oppressive structures of society as much as in human individuals. The booklet then asks, "Do we look for opportunities to share with the wider world a vision of a preferential option for the poor?" (2008: 8). Later it stresses the need for churches to encourage community participation in their work, so that residents contribute their skills to various tasks and get a feeling of ownership of the activities. Churches must consider the capabilities of the people in their parish and not just behave as exclusive groups (2008: 9-10).

Urban theology

Background to urban theology

Although there has not been a prominent liberation theology movement in Britain, some liberation theology concepts have transferred into what is known as urban theology. It has even been suggested that urban theology belongs to a family of liberation theologies that are all concerned with applying Christian traditions to contemporary contexts (Vincent 2010: 5).

Urban theologians trace the roots of their theology to historical Christian movements to engage with the urban poor. Examples include the 19th century City Missions which were established in big cities such as Glasgow and Bristol, with a focus on evangelism and with some practical work. Also – the Catholic “slum priests” of East London who were joined by Anglican clergy and served the poor on the fringes of society. Other faith initiatives that could be classed as urban missions were the Catholic Children’s Society and Muller’s Homes, Dr Barnardo’s and the Salvation Army. In the early years of the 20th century, Methodists began to organise aid through their missions, educational programmes and central halls. But with the horrors of the First World War came a sense that the theology of the day was inadequate to answer extreme situations of need. The employment of chaplains in munitions factories turned into the start of the Industrial Mission, and a theological college was established to train clergy to minister with a fresh approach (Marchant 2004a: 2-3; Green 2003: 33). In 1947 the William Temple Foundation was founded to develop ways that the church could adapt to urban communities in Britain’s post-war secularising society. Temple was the Archbishop of Canterbury and the church accepted his view that theology should inform the values that politicians work with but not the policies that they put together. This brought sharp disagreement from workers involved with grassroots missions (Green 2003: 35).

In the 1960s and 1970s, theologians sought to find theological responses to contemporary life and contemplated how churches could adapt to modern urban settings. Bishop Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963) articulated a radical perspective on updating faith so that it could be relevant to secular society. On the church’s evangelical wing, David Sheppard’s Evangelical Urban Training Project represented efforts to enter into urban mission, motivated partly by the absence of the working class in church. Donald Reeve’s Urban Ministry Project was set up in 1970 as a training centre designed to equip clergy for service by teaching them to reflect upon the relevance of theology to life in the cities (Green 2003: 33-5). For such ventures the doctrine of the incarnation was one way that church intervention

could be grounded in Christian belief, as the incarnation was seen to represent the Lord's presence in the physical reality of everyday lives (Garner 2004: 18).

At around the same time, theologians and sociologists were meeting and discussing the possibility of creating an institute that would combine the insights of theology and sociology in order to better serve the cities (Vincent 2010: 7). In response to this, a team of theologians established the Urban Theology Unit (UTU) and the term "urban theology" introduced for the first time by John Vincent at its inauguration in 1969. Robinson's *Honest to God* style rationalism was one early influence on the UTU as it strove to develop a pragmatic praxis centred around the Jesus of the Gospels (Vincent 2010: 12). Through its educational courses, workshops and publications, the Urban Theology Unit influenced theological thinkers and activists, helping them to discover their own applications of theology to modern scenes.

Meetings of liberal and evangelical leaders involved in urban mission were held in 1974 to exchange perspectives on theology and practice in the cities. Later known as the Urban Mission Training Association, this group became interested in the writings of Paulo Freire and received instruction from Brazilian speakers on methodology grounded in liberation theology (Green 2003: 35). Since liberation theology and urban theology were both tied to the experiences of the people, liberation theology became a major influence on the development of urban theology. In a mission statement of 1994 the Urban Theology Unit committed itself to a number of liberation-style values, including "the empowerment of the poor and the powerless" and the "participation of people in their own education and liberation" (Vincent 2010: 7-8). A body of literature now represents urban theology as a distinct field of study. True to the theology's yearning to translate theology into action, some of these thinkers have become involved in projects to empower communities and stand up for the rights of the people.

It is not evident that the church in Britain has paid close attention to the contribution of urban theology over the years, but one useful development was the publication of the 1985 Anglican report *Faith in the City* (Archbishop of Canterbury's Urban Priorities Commission). The report raised consciousness about the need for the church to engage in social action. Deprivation and inequalities in the cities were linked to structural causes, disinterest and under-investment in areas of need on the part of the government. The report was critical of politicians and the church for not taking the poor seriously enough, recommending that churches be less introspective and readier to engage with their surrounding communities. There were suggestions of increased giving, better use of church

premises to support communities, and capacity building for the laity so that they could be involved in neighbourhood regeneration (Garner 2004: 23-4).

Tenets of urban theology

Urban theology shares with liberation theology the same focus on the relatedness of context, theology and action. Urban theology is generally confined to city areas and demands that a detailed analysis of urban settings be made as a preliminary to theological reflection. Marchant (2004a: 2) recommends making a tour of the local area and conversing with local residents, as well as reading written sources such as newspapers and council records to survey the social history of an area. Garner (2004: 63) argues that urban theology must be adequate to interpret modern cities in a way that comprehensively takes into account global, local, social, cultural, political and economic processes at work. Green (2003: 48-53) examines ways that different forces have shaped the urban scene. Examples include globalisation causing cities to compete for business on a worldwide market, patterns of migration altering the ethnic composition of neighbourhood populations and the transfer of manufacturing industry to other countries. All of these changes have effects on people's lives. For example, the loss of manufacturing industry can result in deprivation, which in turn leads to increased use of drugs and alcohol as people look for artificial means to escape their suffering. The fragmentation of communities makes it easy for city planners to ride roughshod over the will of the people, with little interest in the hardships that their decisions might cause. Decisions that are of benefit to wealthy and influential members of a community may be of detriment to people in another sector of the community. However, such changes create opportunities for the churches to bring healing to damaged and divided communities.

Jones (2009: 6-10) writes that in using urban theology, practitioners must reflect upon themselves and their church. It is relevant to question why we respond, think and develop biases in the ways that we do. What impressions does a church give and what faith traditions does it incorporate? Self-reflection of this sort uncovers intervening factors that shape our theological responses to contextual settings. As in liberation theology, it is strongly felt that contextual analysis and theological reflection must result in action. Action is then followed by further reflective thought in a continuous cycle, so that theology is acted out as a "dynamic interplay of Christian action and theological reflection (Green 2003: 41)."

Urban theologians speak of the need to empower residents who make up the church congregation, and to seek the empowerment of the community beyond the church doors.

Marchant (2004b: 14-15) suggests that churches can promote community participation by employing local people as leaders, which also compensates for the tendency of community activists to be lacking in long-term commitment to an area. He adds that churches should inspire and empower residents to lead their own local churches, as opposed to clergy handing down directives to their congregations. In a 1994 mission statement, the Urban Theology Unit upholds the theological and ministerial potential of each Christian, recognising that lay people are valuable as participants in the running of Christian institutions (Vincent 2010: 7). Erskine (2004: 58) writes that churches need to be listening to communities and discovering what their strengths are, instead of putting across a prescriptive attitude:

Despite the recent flurry of interest in the relationship between church and community, listening to the community still seems to be a challenge for many Christians. There remains a strong urge to keep telling communities that we have all the answers to their problems. The difficulty with this, is that we may completely miss the real questions, strengths and needs within a community.

Green (2003: 56, 63) believes that local people know what values hold a community together and give it meaning. Therefore communities should be at the forefront of regeneration schemes so that plans do not undermine community cohesion or wellbeing. He also believes in helping ordinary people to challenge structural sin or injustice in the social system. Smith (2003: 155) argues that powerlessness is related to institutions restricting the participation of people in development. This trend must be avoided for churches to be able to minister to urban communities in a way that is authentic. In his words, churches must “move from ministering ‘for’ to ministering ‘with’ the powerless of this world”.

Urban theologians find some Christian traditions especially useful for reflection and active ministry in the cities. Green (2003: 81) sees inspiration for working towards change in Christ’s teachings surrounding the kingdom of God, as these carry a message not to be indifferent to the sufferings of others and to be prepared to cross cultural barriers in order to show compassion. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example. For Green, the kingdom’s style of leadership was demonstrated in Christ’s connections with the minor town of Capernaum, whereas the worldly leadership of the day sought to construct power bases in the big cities. Christ invited the poor to participate in bringing in this new kingdom by acting in accordance with its moral foundations of love and justice. The kingdom thus gives credibility to ministry that condemns injustices, transects community divides to offer care,

rejects top-down leadership styles and supports the powerless to participate in shaping their own neighbourhoods. The message of the kingdom demands departure from common presuppositions, since the word “repentance” in the New Testament is translated from the Greek *metanoia* meaning a changed mindset. When Christ healed a paralysed man, the act required a change to the mindset of the man’s friends who had to realise that he was no longer physically dependent. Green argues for a *metanoia* style repentance on the part of the church, expressed through projects that support people to help themselves and determine their own identity, rather than leaving them still needing to be carried by others (2003: 90-1).

Marchant (2004b: 8) identifies a variety of scriptures that might be used to motivate and guide urban programmes. He sees the gospel message as a mission that began with Christ’s announcement that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to preach the good news to the poor, to liberate the oppressed and to set captives free. That work continues with his commission that followers must spread the gospel message through all the nations. Another example is found in the depiction of the Servant Messiah in the Isaiah 53 passage. This is a pattern which Christ appeared to follow, thereby showing that ministry is not all about power play. Marchant finds it pertinent to urban theology that there are many references to God’s involvement with cities in the Bible. In fact, the final vision of God’s interaction with humankind is set out as a heavenly city in the New Testament book of *Revelation*. Garner (2004: 98) suggests that the Trinity may be used as a model for regeneration partnerships. Just as the three separate persons of the Trinity express the one social God, so partnerships between churches, other agencies and residents can promote the same spirit of love, care and development in the community.

Some urban theologians believe that the denominational churches are in a good position to be able to work alongside communities. Wallis (1998: 307) writes that although questions are asked as to whether traditional churches can make the necessary changes, many believers are hungry for a new vision that can bring alive their commitment to Christ, knowing that their Christianity should be finding greater realisation. Likewise Green (1987: 2) mentions feelings of frustration among Christians who are looking for ways to apply their faith to contemporary issues. Marchant (2004: 64, 87) argues that churches demonstrate levels of utility that exceed what could be expected from their numbers, and that through their voluntary work, they play an important part in maintaining the social networks and activity of the community. Churches can thus be considered “micro-enterprises” with significant ability to regenerate neighbourhoods in partnership with other agencies.

Weaknesses and strengths of liberation theology and urban theology

Problems with liberation and urban theologies

One difficulty in using liberation theology as an argument for change in the church, is that many believe that the movement is no longer a force for change. In Latin America the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ousting of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua following U.S. economic pressure, were taken to signal the triumph of capitalism over Marxism. The same transformation was used by critics to herald the end of liberation theology with its Marxist methodology (Tombs 2002: 292). The introduction of democratic systems in Latin American countries cast doubt over the ongoing relevance of the movement's political expression. Instead of looking to revolutionary means of securing justice, why not use the new found freedoms of democracy to stand up for the poor? Burdick (1993: 222) writes that with democratisation, the role of campaigning for improved rights and conditions was largely taken over by secular neighbourhood organisations, social movements and political parties. Meanwhile the Vatican's criticisms of liberation theology, and its tactics of appointing conservative Bishops in Latin America, have weakened the spiritual legitimacy of the movement. Muskus (2002: 268) claims that all things considered, the Latin American liberation theology movement has failed inasmuch as it has not delivered the widespread liberation of the poor and oppressed that was once hoped for.

Another issue is the decline of the liberation theology movement in contrast to the success of Pentecostalism and African religions in Latin America. If a theology of grassroots action is so desirable, why has liberation theology lost members while other religious movements have grown? Burdick (1993: 15) argues from his fieldwork in the Brazilian town of Sao Jorge, that the base communities are a less attractive option for certain social groups. Their emphasis on group reading means that they are less accessible to the poorer strata of the working class who tend to be illiterate. They also feature a gossip culture which makes it harder for women to confide over marital problems. Within some base communities patriarchy and racial intolerances persist, whereas the Pentecostal Churches and the African religion offer emotional support for ill-treated women and for the racially oppressed. These religions also believe in the spiritual transformation of believers, which provides a counter-discourse to stigmatisation. Burdick adds that liberation theology's concept that it is down to poor and marginalised people to change the unjust conditions of the world is not very comforting (1995: 223-25). Shaull and Cesar (2000: 18) attribute the popularity of Pentecostalism to the fact that it offers the poor an experience of spiritual transformation. In

this way it appeals to an inner need rather than limiting its focus to the material. Another part of the problem may be that the base community model does not succeed in every instance, as there have been times when base communities have floundered or failed. Hebblethwaite (1993: 23-6) refers to communities that moved through cycles of optimism and depression, as well as communities that fell apart so that only the coordinators were left. Other problems include the difficulty of adapting illiterate, hard working people to Bible study after a hard day's labour, as well as the years that a base community might take to mature from being a scripture reflection group to a politically active collective.

On theological grounds, liberation theology has been criticised for its materialism and revolutionary political outlook. Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, accuses liberation theology of translating Biblical revelations into a materialistic Marxist framework of liberation that supersedes the role of God (Ratzinger, 1984a). Ratzinger disputes many aspects of liberation theology, sometimes stating where he thinks that the theology conveys the wrong priorities. For example, he argues that the story of Exodus cannot be understood solely in political terms, as its primary purpose was as the event leading to the forging of the covenant of God with Israel at Mount Sinai. He also argues that to prioritise the political dimension of sin, conceals the ultimate priority of spiritual salvation from sin that is to be found in Christ (Ratzinger 1984b).

Liberation theologians Boff and Boff (1987: 64-5) acknowledge some criticisms of liberation theology that they have encountered over the years. There is a view that the theology goes too far in looking to social action and campaigning to improve living conditions, while losing sight of the spiritual aspect of liberation. Boff and Boff accept that ultimately the power which inspires Christian commitment to the poor is found through communion with God in prayer and contemplation. The focus on liberation may overshadow other important features of humanity such as friendship, reconciliation and open dialogue. There is also a danger that forms of human suffering other than economic poverty will be diminished in significance. Liberation theologians must be careful not to devalue the insights of other theologies, or to create divisions by stressing liberation theology's differences with the traditional church. Indifference towards the traditional church can make it hard for churches to grasp the value of liberation theology and add their own ideas. Obviously an expression of liberation theology that alienates other Christian believers reduces its chances of bringing traditional churches on board to empower communities.

It is harder to find criticisms of urban theology, though urban theology might be expected to suffer from many of the same problems as liberation theology, given the closeness

between the two. For example its emphasis on material needs and political action could be off-putting to Evangelical or Charismatic influenced churches which stress deep spirituality and the born again experience. It is noticeable that urban theologians often say little about the gospel as a message of personal salvation in their writings. One exception is Bakke (1998: 293) who appears to respond to this situation by saying that if churches engage with communities without preaching the message of salvation, then they fail to give the best thing that they have to offer. This is critical because if churches gain the impression that urban theology is not interested in winning converts, they may overlook its positive points such as the importance that it attaches to applying the Christian scriptures to modern settings.

Early links between urban theology and the radical theology that influenced the Urban Theology Unit may not have been helpful in some ways. Radical theologians of the 1960s were keen to provoke a rethink of established Christian thought, using deliberately challenging terms like “Secular Christ” – the title of a publication by Vincent in 1968. Often when understood, such terms are less controversial than they first appear. The term “Secular Christ” encapsulates a view that even the actions of secular groups to help communities in a secularising society, reflect the principles which Christ taught. Yet the language and ideas of radical theology arguably *de-radicalised* theology by diminishing the spiritual and experiential dimensions of faith. In the same decade these were being made popular by the Charismatic movement introduced to Britain by Wilkerson’s *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963). Perhaps it is not surprising then, that neither radical nor urban theologies have become mainstream influences. A theologian at the Urban Theology Unit has said:

I’m happy to use the term “liberation theology” because people will talk about it. I’ve been talking about a gospel theology and an urban theology for twenty five years, and no-one takes any notice at all (Jones quoted by Vincent 2010: 13).

Most British churches appear to be little influenced by liberation and urban theologies. Presumably the characteristics of these theologies, with their Marxist influences, a tendency to concentrate on conflict, their focus on the material rather spiritual things, and some questionable ideas, create an impression that they are too dubious to take on board. Another difficulty is that fully incorporating the reflections of liberation and urban theologies would necessitate much self-criticism on the part of the church. To embrace liberation theology would question church hierarchies and the way that these obstruct participation by denying people access to decision-making processes. If it was found that traditional churches

undermine the civic capacity of the laity, then this would be an awkward reality to face up to. Notably the church resource pack *No hands But Ours*, touches upon liberation theology themes that can be enacted without really challenging the structures of the church. In other words, the church in Britain seems ready only to accept the less unsettling elements of liberation theology.

The case in favour of liberation and urban theologies

Dr Walter Aardman, moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, believes that critics have been too quick to synonymise liberation theology with Marxist philosophy (Aardman 2009). They have thus mistakenly assumed that the liberation theology movement died with the socialist style of the old Soviet Union. While liberation theologians have employed some Marxist tools of analysis, their inspiration for living in solidarity with the poor has always been their encounter with Christ as Liberator. Aardman argues that liberation theology continues to be relevant and to motivate civil movements and activism within the ecclesial base communities. Sobrino (1996: ix) asserts that far from ceasing to be a force for change, the most productive aspect of the movement is its method of grounding theological reflection in social action.

Some literature provides examples of what has been achieved through liberation theology's style of community action carried out in the ecclesial base communities. Tombs (2002) does not mention specific communities but maintains that collectively the base communities profoundly altered the character of Brazilian society in a number of ways. Liberation perspectives applied to the scriptures gave rise to local projects that brought benefits to neighbourhoods such as food cooperatives, schools, health clinics, electricity, water, sewerage systems, and paved roads. Base communities also joined forces to campaign over wider issues such as working conditions or land distribution. Tombs believes that these activities imparted confidence, skills and democratic experience to members, who were then prepared for involvement in large-scale political upheavals – including the establishment of a democratic government in Brazil in 1980. When military dictatorships tried to silence the people by clamping down on organised protests, the base communities continued to voice the concerns of the poor, often at great cost to themselves. The model of organisation within the base communities, with its democratic principles and leaders appointed from the laity, questioned the appropriateness of classical church hierarchies, while the rootedness of liberation theology in the life situations of the people caused it to become more popular than would be the case for an academic theology (2002: 173-75).

Drogus (2000: ch. 5) discusses opportunities for the liberation of women that were made available in the ecclesial base communities of the Santo Antonio parish of Sao Paulo, Brazil. From the early days it was the women who had greeted the founding clergy with the most enthusiastic response, and so daily activity and self-governance by the community came to revolve around the Mothers' Clubs. As the base communities became more politically active in the 1970s, the women were able to present the movement in such a way as to attract females of varying political and theological views. On the one hand, the base communities remained associated with Catholic Church tradition which promoted patriarchal gender roles and excluded women from ordination. On the other, the base communities opened up new religious and political roles which were often taken up by women, including leadership of worship groups and membership of community councils. Drogus writes that although there has been more empowerment for women in the public sphere than in the family home, these new roles caused women to rethink gender traditions and many are trying to change the perceptions held by their children.

The case of an upper middle class faith community that was established in the USA along liberation theology lines is documented by Rader (2008). Called the Center for New Creation, the community was started in 1979 by two housewives together with their friends. The purpose of the group was to unite those experiencing oppression and poverty with a stratum of society who had the power to influence change in the area of greater social and economic justice. As in other base communities, individual and collective experience was combined with group study to arrive at religious and political understandings. The "theology of accompaniment" was adopted directly from Latin America and involved accompanying the poor in their struggles and sharing in their risks. Control was to be deferred to the poor, with confidence placed in their abilities and capacity to shape their own destiny. This ran contrary to usual tendencies where "the privileged absorb the stereotypes that poor people are ignorant, undisciplined, impulsive, incompetent, unorganised (2008: 146)." The privileged classes were educated as to the situation in Latin America by delegations of liberation clergy who came to speak at the centre, and they were encouraged to support the poor through political activism. By the time the Center for New Creation wound down in 1992, its work in raising awareness of how poverty-stricken people live had inspired some citizens to travel to Latin America to offer their services to the poor (2008: 147).

Activism among the ecclesial base communities does not appear to have declined as far as is sometimes alleged. A journalist described a scene he saw in a Brazilian city which suggests that some base communities have remained politically active:

Representatives of 50 base communities gathered at the St Paul the Apostle Church on the east side of this sprawling city, in an area of humble workers' residences and squatter slums. With four priests present, readings from the Bible alternated with more worldly concerns: criticisms of government proposals to reduce pensions and workers' rights under the Brazilian labor code. The service ended with the Lord's Prayer and then a hymn...

Afterward, discussion turned to other social problems, chief among them a lack of proper sanitation. A representative of the Left-wing Workers' Party discussed strategies to press the government to complete a sewer project. Congregants agreed to organize a campaign to lobby for it (Rother 2007).

Fraser and Jeffrey (2005) mention other recent examples of activism among the base communities. These include the launch of educational and psychological programs for sex workers by the base communities of the Nicaraguan capital of Managua, and the involvement of base communities in resisting national and local corruption. Kennel-Shank and Paarlberg (2005) describe a base community in the Nicaraguan village of Jinocua that has been developing community self-help projects since the 1990s. Early projects included a vegetable garden and a system for producing organic fertilizer. Then the loss of homes due to flooding spurred a redoubling of efforts, leading to the establishment of pig and chicken cooperatives by local women. This was followed by a bakery, a dressmaker's shop, a carpentry shop and a natural medicine cooperative that used local plants as a resource to heal community members. In 2005 the base community was given communal land that had been purchased on their behalf by a supporter. Meanwhile in El Salvador the CEBES network of base communities formed the Fundahmer organisation which supports base communities and other marginalised communities in development and educational projects. On its website the Fundahmer organisation has kept a small news update on political and developmental activities among some of the base communities (Fundahmer 2010).

In Britain, one church member has written of how liberation theology informed her work towards people empowerment and social justice when she supported the residents of a tower block complex to form a Tenant's Group (Farrands 1997: 59). A talk with a resident named 'Alan' led him to campaign within the blocks and produce a meeting of residents. Out of the meeting emerged a resident-led group intent on removing pimps and drug dealers from the tower blocks, and insisting that a play area and community room be added to the estate. A

blow came when Alan and five other members of the management were arrested for armed robbery, leaving the tenants feeling bewildered and betrayed. However, the group gradually realised that the setback did not mean that they had to stop:

But then, incredibly, new shoots began starting up. The black members of the group, none of whom were involved with the crime, began to say that despite what he did, Alan had the right ideas. They are still active. They want to challenge big issues. They won't accept being powerless. They are planning a meeting of a new Tenant's Group (ibid).

There are also examples in Britain of Christians that have put urban theology into practice. Green (1987) writes an account of his work among a church that was an amalgamation of Anglicans and Methodists. A group came together to examine how the future actions of the church could be guided by the parables in the Gospels. Early on the group acquired a sense of equality in dialogue so that no individual could give prominence to themselves (1987: 20-1). The parable of the Good Samaritan seemed to emphasise the importance of working alongside others, prompting them to consider what resources were at hand to help the community such as the church buildings. The same parable showed a needy person being helped but not left in a state of dependency. These reflections led the group to think that an information centre could support people to gain control over their problems by putting them in touch with the necessary services and resources. A government survey was discovered which had found that 87 percent of respondents had wanted an information and advice centre (1987: 39-43). The group elected members who would take the lead in setting up and managing the information centre. It was noted that in the parable of the Good Samaritan a Priest and a Levite were deterred from helping a man who lay on the ground with severe injuries, as their religious roles forbade them from touching a dead or half-dead person. A modern parallel was seen in professional workers' protocols which can restrain them from being able to administer certain kinds of informal care. The group decided that the advice centre would have an informal atmosphere and would not treat human beings coldly as "cases" or clients". Volunteers would be at hand to "keep the teapot pouring". The management committee consisted of local people belonging to the church, and the Citizens Advice Bureau ran training workshops for volunteers (1987: 45-6). This initiative shows urban theology at work, empowering lay members to develop projects and residents to take steps to improve their quality of life.

Walsh (1998) gives an account of a Christian mission that began by providing food and blankets, but then turned into a broad based organising campaign against a polluting factory. The change came when workers realised that a dependency culture and low self-esteem were big problems in the area (1998: 135). They began to see the potential for local people to effect change after meeting with some residents who had campaigned against the lead pollution emanating from a battery crushing factory. A meeting of mission workers and residents led to a renewed campaign which went on to enlist the support of a GP, a supermarket, a head teacher and a company whose workforce were exposed to the factory's pollutants. Local people who joined the campaign were given positions of responsibility and began to acquire new abilities, growing in confidence until they were able to organise meetings for themselves. One individual said that she had never talked to a "posh person" before and did not know how to communicate with them; she soon learned the necessary skills. Subsequent meetings attracted more residents who became angry when they learned of the health risks. A hundred people held a demonstration outside the civic centre, and an engineer was commissioned to perform a pollution test which was reported by the media. Community self-esteem increased as residents became aware of their own power to bring transformations. Finally the factory was relocated (1998: 136-37). Walsh believes that aspects of liberation contained in the gospel message were fulfilled through the campaign:

The Good News which Jesus promised the Poor, was happening before my eyes; captives were being liberated and the oppressed set free. As events unfolded and finally the date was set for the relocation of the factory, I could only marvel at the amazing grace of the One who came to live among us and be with us always. The dream to empower and to liberate was becoming a reality (1998: 137).

To summarise the main points, liberation and urban theology argue for a form of mission that empowers communities to address local needs by developing their own social action. However, due to the spiritual emphases on salvation, reconciliation and relationship with God found in many Christian outlooks, liberation and urban theology are vulnerable to criticisms that they focus too much on the material domain. Moreover, the association of these theologies with Marxism, radical theology and societal conflict might constitute a deterrent for many British churches. On the other hand, liberation and urban theology present clear and understandable arguments for community empowerment from key areas of the

Christian scriptures, such as the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, the praxis of Christ and the kingdom of God. It seems that many of these arguments could be helpful in constructing a general theological case for churches to adopt a community development approach, while leaving out the more contentious themes such as criticisms of the traditional church. The social action generated by liberation theology has been subject to criticism, especially from the view that the decline of the liberation theology movement can be considered evidence against its merits. Yet there continue to be successful examples of community action within the movement, together with some cases of British Christian groups supporting community action inspired by an urban theology that overlaps with liberation theology. These examples suggest that the two theologies can provide concepts to help drive a ministry that addresses unmet needs by empowering people to construct self-help initiatives.

Community development compared with liberation theology and urban theology

In outlining the main concepts of liberation and urban theologies, it becomes clear that there are parallels with most of the participatory principles of community development. These parallels are elaborated in a later chapter but some of the more obvious correspondences are highlighted here.

Community development, liberation theology and urban theology, all arose during a stage of world history when protest movements and Marxist analyses of conflict were becoming widespread. Consequently all three disciplines share a penchant for people empowerment and make criticisms of disempowering structures of governance. In the early days of community development, practitioners traced the problems faced by communities to structures of inequality and oppression, believing that the answer was to mobilise residents to campaign for justice. Although the radical wing of community development has declined, its adherents continue to critique social systems and professionals that restrict community participation. Similarly, liberation theology emerged from a setting where the poor held little power and economic policies were seen to worsen inequalities between the social classes. The ecclesial base communities often sided with left wing political groups to try to secure more rights for the people. Urban theologians too, make some criticisms of top-down forms of governance. Vincent (2010: 11) asks who decides what gets implemented when city councils devise large-scale economic, social and amenity programmes, while Green (2003: 73) believes in mobilising the people to oppose structural sin and oppression. These

theologies have also been critical of hierarchical control within the church. Across all three disciplines there is a commitment to increased participation as a matter of social justice.

All three disciplines recognise the value of capacity building. Community development theorists maintain that for communities to be fully involved in regeneration, members need training including informal sessions aimed at building democratic and communication skills. In liberation theology there has been a focus on reading and education as a means of empowerment for base community members. The stages by which a base community begins as scripture reflection group, and then evolves into a collective whose members support their local neighbourhood, might be regarded as another style of capacity building. It reflects a deepening of faith and a growing process that has been compared to the training of a priest (Barbe 1987: 105 cited by Hebblethwaite 1993: 26). In Britain the value that urban theologians attach to capacity building is evident in the real life examples documented by Green (1987) and Walsh (1998), where residents were given positions of responsibility and their subsequent increase in skills was celebrated.

All three disciplines appreciate participation as a way of raising self-esteem. For example community development stresses the new confidence that individuals acquire from learning and working together, as well as the value of celebrating local cultures in order to reinforce a community's positive self-identity. In liberation theology participation is closely connected with dignifying the poor. Some ecclesial base communities have fostered their sense of history and culture by reflecting on where they have come from, who they are and where they aim to go. Once this sense of culture and history has been achieved, people can be encouraged to take pride in it (Hebblethwaite 1993: 109). Through their belief in God's preferential option for the poor, the base communities may even be able to generate some pride in the reality of impoverishment (*ibid*). In urban theology literature, Walsh's account of the campaign against the battery crushing factory associates the increased self-esteem of the victorious community with themes of liberation in the gospel message.

Community development, liberation theology and urban theology, believe in utilising the knowledge, skills and ideas that communities have to offer. Community development stresses the need to work with the assets already possessed by communities and warns against schemes that do not allow communities to contribute what they have to offer. In Latin America one of the purposes of the ecclesial base communities was to enable local people to pool their knowledge, skills, and resources in community self-help. In liberation theology participation comes with a view that the poor are chosen by God to be historic agents of change. Meanwhile, urban theologians have similarly stressed that communities

should be heard and supported to play a leading role in regeneration. Their conviction is that communities have in themselves the potential to change situations for the better, so churches should work alongside them rather than setting the agenda.

All three disciplines have in common the theme of consciousness raising, which is traceable in each case to the work of Paulo Freire (1972). Community workers sometimes use group work to explore how local problems relate to wider structures in society, so that action might be taken to tackle these problems at their source. In liberation theology, a central aim has been to assist the poor to become a politically effective force, aware of the conditions of their exploitation and ready to push for change. Urban theologians agree that the church should support communities to combat structural sin, which naturally requires some nurturing of the political awareness of community members.

Some differences between the three disciplines are also apparent. In liberation theology's ecclesial base communities, the abilities and energy of local people were sometimes the only kind of help that was available. Consequently liberation theology has not always taken the same interest in multi-agency partnerships as pluralist community development theorists have done. Instead, base communities have commonly joined forces with each other and sometimes with left wing groups. The practical objectives are also likely to differ, as community action in Latin America necessarily addresses more rudimentary needs. There is a difference between a Brazilian base community's efforts to address malnutrition in local children, and residents of a British estate lobbying for the improvement of a children's play area. Another difference is found in the composition of the participant group. In community development it is important to include different kinds of people in order to represent different sectors of the community. In contrast, those who participate in Latin America's base communities constitute a more homogenous group. Adherents of different religious faiths are not permitted to join the base communities and the fixed focus on the circumstances of the poor is likely to be a deterrent for people of other social class backgrounds. Liberation theologians stress that the base communities are for all Christians and that their direction towards the poor is purely a matter of following the Bible. Even so, their theology's embeddedness in the experience of poverty will be alienating to people who have different life experiences. Secular trends and the absence of a working class movement in Britain make it very doubtful that Latin America's base communities could become so prolific among the poor in Britain. Meanwhile, urban theology literature often speaks of urban communities in general and does not give such a strong impression of confinement to the

socio-economic poor. Urban theology focuses on city areas, whereas Latin American liberation theology is often practised by communities in rural areas.

The main implication of these differences is that churches in Britain would not practice community empowerment in the same way that the Latin American liberation theology movement has done, even if they were persuaded by liberation theology concepts to adopt a community development approach. Possible partnership arrangements, different practical objectives, and a different composition of participants would influence the style of organisation taken. The future of church and community development would be a 'blank canvas' ready for a new British style of faith motivated community empowerment to form.

Conclusion

Liberation and urban theologies have acquired many participatory principles that parallel those of community development. Importantly, liberation and urban theologies ground their beliefs and actions in the Christian faith, and in so doing, they offer evidence that theology can be a strong motive rather than a barrier to churches adopting a community development approach. While it is impossible to determine how any church might respond to a theological case, it would arguably be a rather intransigent church that failed to see any merit in the insights of liberation theology or urban theology. It can hardly be denied that both social justice and human liberation feature in the teachings of the Old Testament prophets and Christ's discourse on the kingdom of God. Sometimes the only option to secure justice is to empower people to take action, as in Walsh's example of the campaign against the polluting factory. As Sheppard seems to say, when churches pray for God's kingdom to come but do not address injustices in the local community, they face a contradiction between their faith and their actions. Biblical episodes such as the healing of a paralysed man and the parable of the Good Samaritan, demonstrate that helping people without leaving them in a state of dependency is part of a liberating ministry befitting the kingdom.

Therefore churches might improve their outreach if instead of merely providing services, they supported residents in disadvantaged areas to develop their abilities, grow in self-confidence and take a lead in increasing quality of life in their neighbourhood. As liberation theology shows, this would follow patterns where the poor and powerless are supported to found a nation in Old Testament times, and to organise the early church in the New Testament era. Even if much of the main corpus of liberation and urban theology could not be accepted, the two theologies still offer basic insights which could be used to persuade churches of the need to empower communities. Liberation and urban theologies also possess

an action-reflection cycle, which churches can use to reflect on situations of injustice and powerlessness and to examine how their own beliefs can provide the inspiration for faith-driven community development. As Smith (2002: 173) points out, all of the main world religions allow margin for their spiritual values to be interpreted in an emancipatory way, and this potential is well suited to community development.

3. Methodology

In this chapter I summarise the methodology that I used to conduct case studies of three separate churches. I discuss my philosophical stance, research traditions used, research design, methods of data collection, main areas of inquiry and ethical considerations. I also mention some problems that I encountered and how personal values and my own community action influenced the prominent themes in my work.

Beginning with fieldwork

My thesis began unusually, with fieldwork preceding the literature review and following an exploratory approach. Explorative research is used in the social sciences when the aim is not to begin with hypotheses and preconceived ideas to be tested, but to examine and assess social processes and settings that have been little researched. Concepts, questions and possibilities for future research might be derived from this kind of work (Robson 2003: 59). Aware that I had chosen a topic which had received little in the way of academic investigation, I preferred to discover what issues were particularly interesting and significant. I began with a general research question that inquired as to the strengths of church based welfare provision, as this gave my fieldwork some basic direction without imposing too many constraints on what aspects of church and community could be examined.

During my fieldwork, the question arose as to whether there could be improvement in the churches with regard to enabling church members and local residents to plan social action – in light of the successful community development work that was going on locally. This then formed the sharper research question that would focus my data collection and emerging concepts onto a specific theme. My fieldwork thus became part of a thesis exploring whether churches could produce the positive effects that advocates of participation associate with the empowerment of grassroots people⁸. Academic fields that were suited to the corresponding literature review were community development, liberation theology and urban theology, since these all placed an emphasis on participation and empowerment.

⁸ I use this term in the thesis not in an ideological sense, but to denote lay members of a church together with residents of the wider community around the church. Both groups may contain many individuals who have little experience of empowerment and involvement in decision-making.

Philosophical considerations

It was necessary to align myself with an ontology and epistemology that would provide a theoretical framework for deciding what could be understood from my data. Theoretical weaknesses in different philosophical approaches helped me to make my choices.

I understood that the realist ontology assumes a worldly reality that can be known through the senses; but that it cannot disprove that our mental constructs distort the things we sense, so that what we perceive does not correspond to any external reality. Building upon realist thought, the positivist epistemology assumes that humans can be studied in the same way as material objects, in order to develop uniform laws on human nature. But since the time of Dilthey (1833-1911) and others, it has been countered that social action cannot be studied in the same way as the natural world, as variations in behaviour spring from humans responding to their own individualistic understandings and motives (Hughes 2003:17-23).

The idealist ontology assumes that no reality exists independently of our mental constructs (Ritchie and Lewis 2006: 16). But if taken to the extreme, this logic would cast doubt over the purpose of any research, as findings could be seen as mere products of the minds of the researchers. Idealism has influenced the interpretivist orthodoxy which claims that social phenomena are best explained by exploring subjective processes which drive human activity. Helpful are Weber's (1864-1920) use of interpretivism and his adoption of *verstehen* or empathising with the mindset of social actors to understand human behaviour. In his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1967) Weber theorised that Protestant religious beliefs motivated certain behaviours which in turn gave birth to capitalist economic systems. This position accepts the criterion of empathetic understanding while not denying the existence of a world with objectifiable features such as political and economic structures (Layder 2006: 92-3).

A further ontology, that of critical realism, has some value in that it does not reject an external reality but accepts that our knowledge of reality is prone to distortion from human constructs (Ritchie and Lewis 2006: 16). Believing that causal relationships cannot be reduced to mere conjunctions of events, critical realists have been interested in tracing 'generative mechanisms' that affect social phenomena but which are not directly observable (Bhaskar 1989: 4). I anticipated that there could be many such mechanisms within the organisational systems of my case study churches. For example, a church with a history of providing social care might lean towards prescribing welfare services rather than supporting community self-help, even if some emancipatory values can be found in its theology. In this case the generative factor would be a familiarity with past types of activity, influencing

future planning. I took on board the above points of critical realism, while deciding that it would be correct to use interpretivism with its empathetic approach for my epistemology – as a church's strengths and weaknesses in welfare provision would have linkages to theological motivations and subjective responses to the church. Weber's interpretivism, which gives attention to structural and subjective causes of phenomena, would carry into my fieldwork where I would explore structures and motivations to understand church activity.

Research design

Qualitative research seemed the obvious choice for my fieldwork, as the exploratory nature of this work was suited to the qualitative tradition of generating concepts from firsthand observations. But I chose not to confine my fieldwork to qualitative methods alone, realising that a useful tool for gauging the value of church based welfare services would be a quantitative survey that measured local opinions and experiences of the church. I was aware that there has been some criticism of the practice of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches due to their differing methodological assumptions, but this would at least be an instance of using both approaches to increase the amount of intelligence on a research topic (Ritchie and Lewis 2006: 40-1).

I decided to use an ethnographic fieldwork design as it conferred several advantages. Since churches and communities are complex, it was appropriate to choose a tradition that involved immersing myself in church activity to understand associated social processes. With an ethnographic approach I would also be able to learn more about the neighbourhood where a church provided its welfare services. Ethnography would permit the use of multiple techniques including observation, interviews and collation of data from public documents, which would enable a sufficiently in-depth picture to be built up to bring insights from a complex social setting. This work would differ from studies of church based welfare that drew conclusions largely from the self reports of faith group leaders (e.g. Furbey et al 2006, Jackson and Kimberley 2004).

In some respects my methodology resembles that of the WREP (Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective) project which studied churches that provide welfare services in European countries. The researchers made qualitative case studies of church based welfare provision in specific localities, realising that the qualitative case study approach could impart a deeper understanding of church welfare. This is desirable considering the current lack of knowledge in this relatively unresearched area (Bäckström and Davie 2010: 17). The researchers collected data through a variety of techniques including interviews, analysing

published documents, observational work and study tours, to analyse the functions of churches in welfare. Data was collected from figures in the local community to help gauge the role of church welfare (2010: 19).

As the direction of my research turned to themes of church in relation to participation and empowerment, I looked at community development projects that were happening in the same neighbourhoods as my case study churches. These secular projects offered evidence of the benefits of participation, causing me to reflect on ways that churches might achieve positive outcomes by adopting community development principles of participation. My research design thus became comparative in a way that I had not anticipated. Features of the community development projects such as the incorporation of local knowledge compared with features of the churches such as rapid action produced by top-down leadership styles. And then my third case study became comparative in a different way, as a local top-down neighbourhood regeneration scheme in the area contrasted with the participatory approach of this third church.

Data collection methods

In my case studies I quickly found that different techniques were suited to different situations. Semi-structured interviews were useful for exploring detailed phenomena such as doctrinal motivations underlying the activity of church leaders, or details that professionals or active citizens could supply about the local community. But there were other occasions when I had to rely upon naturally occurring conversations. For example, I found that working class individuals were reticent to be interviewed but could be engaged in conversation regarding the work of the church. In my second case study it was not viable to hold interviews in the Salvation Army hall where a large number of people would always be present in a relatively small space. It would mean that far from being confidential, a tape recorded interview would arouse the curiosity of others in the room. At the same time, I did not feel that I had built sufficient bridges of trust with these individuals – most of whom were female or elderly – to ask to interview them in their own homes. There were, however, opportunities for low key conversations to be held over cups of tea and meals served at the weekly Lunch Club and Toddler Group.

In selecting respondents to be interviewed or conversed with, I chose people with different roles and levels of decision-making authority within the church, as well as lay members with no official role. Finding informants from the wider community involved a

combination of intelligent decision-making and use of chance opportunities. Internet sources, published documents and tours of the local area uncovered professional workers in the community who could talk about its characteristics. Sometimes when making study tours of the community or attending public events, encounters with community workers or active residents developed into useful conversations as a further source of data.

Some of my fieldwork involved observation of church activities, including worship services, home group devotionals and different projects such as cafés and children's groups. A well documented difficulty in observation is the challenge that researchers face in recording data without interrupting natural behaviour. However, I found that in church buildings data could be easily jotted down while facing a noticeboard so that it would look like I was taking information from a poster. When a church sermon or meeting was in progress it was possible to record impressions while appearing to be taking down what was said. There were times during observation in my third case study when individuals wanted to give me some views. Observation momentarily turned into a conversation with me writing notes to capture all that they were saying. This certainly introduced an alien action which may have affected others who were present. On the other hand, I saw that openly making notes of what respondents were saying at least showed them that they were being heard, which seemed to encourage them to say more.

Other useful sources of data included websites and documents. All of my case study churches had their own websites, and with similarities to Majee and Hort (2010: 421) I found these sources useful for supplying data that had been missed in interviews and observation.⁹ The local authorities in two of my case study areas had published statistics on local deprivation, giving clear insights into local community needs. Also helpful were the results of social surveys, as well as reports on neighbourhood regeneration and community development projects. There was much variation between case studies with regard to the type and the amount of published information. In my second case study an accessible neighbourhood management office proved a useful source of materials, which contrasted with the third case study where there was much less published information. A further way to ascertain features of the local community was to examine what kinds of agencies were operating in the area. In order to receive funding to work in a locality, welfare agencies are required to demonstrate the need for their services. It follows that the presence of certain

⁹ In a report on their study of a worker cooperative, Majee and Hort (2010) mention how articles on the cooperative were useful for filling in details not obtained in their interviews.

services such as adult learning, drugs counselling or preschool care, will be indicative of local types of need.

The one quantitative technique that I used was a door-to-door questionnaire which I administered in the first case study. This compared inroads that the church had made into the local community in comparison with another similar sized agency – namely the Time Bank. Effectiveness in the community was measured using a range of questions with tick box answers on a scale of 1 to 10. For example, there were questions that enquired how far respondents would be prepared to use the services of these providers in the future. When different responses were given for the church and the Time Bank, I asked the reasons why and recorded them qualitatively on the questionnaire. The questionnaire captured some demographic information such as the respondent's social class and location in the ward, to see if answers varied according to these factors. Data were processed using the SPSS statistical software package and analysed for correlations using Spearman's rho.

Due to the wide selection of data sources used in my fieldwork and the way that many types of data are mixed together in the thesis, I have provided an Appendix listing the main data sources and the key points arising from them. The Appendix gives an ordered representation of how each source and its themes became important to my work.

Main areas of interest

To achieve order in my data collection I needed to define my main areas of inquiry. I was aware that Harris (1998: 203-4) had started her case studies with many lines of interest drawn from organisation analysis, but I preferred to begin with fewer themes. This would leave room for further themes to be added as they were uncovered in my exploratory fieldwork. Consistent with my original research question, my starting areas of inquiry were:

1. Features of the wider community around the church
2. Authority structures existing within the church
3. Motivational factors existing within the church
4. Strengths of church based welfare services
5. Weaknesses of church based welfare services

Each category is composed of smaller elements. For example, data on the wider community includes demographic characteristics such as class composition, cultural factors and types of

deprivation such as high unemployment. Authority structures within the church include the roles of individuals at different tiers of the church hierarchy, as well as decision-making processes and opportunities for lay members to be involved in planning the activity of the church. Motivational factors within the church include theological concepts and other factors such as an appreciation of the moral purpose of the welfare provided by the church. They include the theologies and aims of the leaders that are influential in steering the work of the church, and factors which motivate the actions of the lay members. I regard authority structures and motivational factors as interrelated categories that comprise much of the organisational systems of churches. Motivating factors appear in theoretical structures of organisation such as Weber's authority types and Etzioni's compliance structures, which Torry (2005: 29-30) finds especially helpful for understanding religious organisations. But these theoretical forms of organisation do not always appear in real life, so I treat authority structures and motivations as separate basic categories of analysis.

By looking at church activity in light of characteristics of the wider community, I saw some strengths and weaknesses of church based welfare services. In my first two case studies the more apparent weaknesses were connected with the lack of participation of lay members. This contrasted with the benefits of citizen involvement in local community development projects. Therefore I added a further two categories of inquiry:

6. Positive outcomes produced by local community development projects

7. Lessons to be learned from local community development projects

As data and findings began to accumulate, it became necessary to focus on the most pertinent themes. In my first two case studies lack of participation in the churches contrasted with examples of active citizenship in local community development, although the efficiency of these churches as welfare providers suggested that to introduce a participatory approach would undermine aspects of church organisation that made them efficient at providing community care. I decided to study a third church that encouraged the participation and empowerment of its members and local residents. This would provide evidence of positive and negative outcomes that might spring from churches adopting participatory principles, as well as a possible theological basis for participation. Therefore I added a final area of inquiry to my fieldwork:

8. Lessons to be learned from a church that supports participation

Ethical considerations

In my fieldwork I intended to follow Diener and Crandall's (1978) well established set of ethical considerations. According to these ethical points, research should avoid causing harm to the participants, should not be undertaken without informed consent, should not involve invasion of privacy, and should not be performed deceptively. However, on the latter point I found myself agreeing with Walsham (2006) that research runs into "grey areas" where one wonders whether they have stepped beyond ethical boundaries. Aware that covert observation involves deception and does not allow social actors to choose whether they want to be researched, I decided that my own use of observation would be overt. Yet I realised that I could not altogether avoid the problems associated with covert observation. It would be impossible to gain permission to research a church from all of the people who attend it, although these people would collectively be in the study. My tendency towards the beginning of a case study was to drop into conversations the fact that I was researching this particular church, so that individuals whom I engaged with would at least know why I was there.

Ethical considerations in my second case study caused me to drop one of my research techniques. A feature of that neighbourhood was that door-to-door surveys were regularly carried out to gather resident feedback on community issues. To avoid interfering with those processes, I chose not to implement the quantitative door-to-door questionnaire that I had used my first case study.

I aimed to show respect for the beliefs and practices that I encountered in my case study churches. In most situations I found this easy to do, because I shared the same beliefs and because my degree in comparative religion had familiarised me with studying faith groups. There was one main instance when arguably I breached that rule. This occurred at my first case study church, when my convictions caused me to suggest in the Annual General Meeting that regular members' meetings be held to enable more input from the laity. This could have obviously been perceived as an observer's criticism of the church's traditional way of doing things. Another problem came in writing up my research, since I had both positive and negative points to make. This issue caused me to take the steps of anonymising people and places so that any criticisms could not be attributed to specific individuals. Where I report on my case studies I consciously adopt a practice of juxtaposing positive and negative perceptions of certain church features, so that the analysis is not all one-sided.

Problems encountered

In my fieldwork I had some difficulty in obtaining the views of lay people as to their role in the church. Many individuals in the first two case studies seemed to have little experience of personal empowerment and had not given much thought to the prospect of their church increasing participation among the laity. Another problem took the form of differing amounts of time allotted for my case studies. Although the first two case studies lasted for many months, the third case study required me to pay for accommodation, as it was too far to travel to on a daily basis. I could therefore only afford to study the third church for a period of about five weeks, so it was hard to gain many insights or to piece together a picture of the wider community where the church was located. Variances in the time available to study each church and differing features of the churches that I studied, led to individualistic case studies with little uniformity of findings. Consequently the case studies are more useful for suggesting a range of ways that participation is relevant to the church, than they are for uncovering generic themes across churches. In the third case study my presence as a researcher aroused suspicion from a few members. The intentional community was unorthodox in some of its values traditions, and I believe there were concerns that I might be writing a negative account of the group. I responded to this problem by regularly stating that I was interested in the benefits of faith groups whose traditions encouraged the participation of their members.

Values

Bryman (2006: 20-1) writes that any concept of there being such a thing as value-free research is increasingly disputed, and that the tendency today is for researchers to admit to personal biases which could have influenced their analysis. At the start of my fieldwork I did not find in myself any strong feelings that seemed likely to affect my work. I did, however, have doubts that churches would be as useful in helping communities as hoped for in government social policy, due mainly to working class attitudes towards the church that I had heard as a manual worker. During my first case study I saw what I perceived to be the disempowerment of lay people in the church, as well as missed opportunities for churches to empower their surrounding communities. I experienced some strong feelings of frustration over that situation for many months. The likelihood is that these thoughts encouraged me to give more attention to phenomena related to disempowerment in the church. In some ways this proved helpful in bringing together a theoretical position from the data, but it may also have caused other significant points to be overlooked. In trying to quell personal feelings in

order to be able to conduct composed research, I found that the best solution was to do small things to empower local residents in my own community.

Praxis

In my thesis I use liberation theology and urban theology to examine whether there is a theological and a practical case for churches to adopt the participatory principles of community development. However, the use of these theologies is not straightforward, as both maintain that it is insufficient simply to read and think about the role of faith in society. Boff and Boff (1984: 23) forbid the student to use liberation theology to reflect on poverty without engaging with the poor themselves. This would violate the praxis in which theological concepts are brought from real life situations. From a faith perspective, Gutierrez (1973: 72) contends that Christian theology can only be authentic when challenging rather than ignoring situations of injustice. Echoing these sentiments, the urban theologian Christine Jones (2010) writes that the study of how faith traditions apply to contemporary contexts, leads to discoveries which then provoke social action. For these reasons I initiated a series of actions in my own local community. I mention them here because the experiences contributed to my understanding of community and influenced my research as to what phenomena and concepts stood out.

Community website

At the start of my research I began to construct a community website for the people living in my neighbourhood. At this stage I had only a sketchy knowledge of what ‘community’ was, but I knew that this was a deprived area which also suffered from a bad reputation. Two aims of the website were to provide a source of information enabling residents to get the help that they needed and to raise the positive profile of the area. The latter aim prompted me to name the website Proud of Twerton after the neighbourhood in question. By interacting with the community to add information to the website, I gained some familiarity with the component parts of communities, such as the work of local welfare agencies, the roles played by ward Councillors and the way that perceptions circulate through the community grapevine. Contact with residents caused me to see that the stigmatisation of council-built estates in my area had more serious effects than I had initially realised. When I turned up to watch a pub football team play a match, one of the younger players mistakenly thought that my website promoting positive features of the community was a practical joke. He had never contemplated that there could be anything to be proud of in his estate.

My reading of liberation theology values and perspectives encouraged me to do new things. My website became prone to supporting community campaigns as they occurred by highlighting the campaigns and letting people know how they could participate. Examples include the support given to a crèche when the local authority withdrew its funding, and coverage of a campaign to save a secondary school (Scofield 2009; 2010). As well as providing this media support, I expressed solidarity with residents by joining demonstrations and speaking at public consultation meetings. Later a nearby town with a poor reputation of its own copied some of my approach by introducing a blog site called Proud of Radstock and using that term as a prefix for some of its community events. I discovered how little knowledge residents possessed on local services and resources. Since many residents used the Facebook social networking site, I set up a Facebook group associated with my website. This enabled me to instantly send news to those who joined the group, via the Facebook messaging facility, with useful information soon being disseminated to more than a hundred families. A free children's club in the neighbourhood trebled in size after details of the club were sent out in this way. Knowledge of the area that I accumulated, prompted council employees to seek my advice on what facilities should be provided at a nearby community centre. I was able to tell them that large sums of money were being invested in youth provisions but with no plans to provide services for the elderly. This point was taken on board and arrangements were made to hold bingo sessions at the centre.

Launching small campaigns

A greater level of involvement with my community made me aware of local social justice issues that required a response. Thus, when planning applications were made to install a mobile phone mast in a heavily populated area close to an infant school and nursery, I delivered flyers to surrounding households to inform residents.¹⁰ The flyers contained information on how to object online or in writing, which generated many objection letters. A couple of residents assisted with a follow up door-to-door petition and thereby learned more about how to resist these masts. I found that residents were angry about the mast application but needed someone to provide a framework for them to communicate their opinions. The phone company made two applications to install the mast but were defeated both times. On another occasion it emerged that doorstep loan companies were calling on residents and tempting them to take out high interest loans to ease the financial pressure of Christmas.

¹⁰ Eight out of ten population studies have discovered significant increases in health symptoms among people living in proximity to mobile phone masts (Khurana et al 2010).

After consulting with several welfare agencies, including a credit union, I made a flyer letting residents know where to get alternative financial help. Schools included the flyer in their newsletters and shopkeepers displayed it in their windows.

Sometimes it was possible to support residents to be proactive in small but important ways. When the firm Lidl applied to build a low-cost grocery store in the area, the plans were greeted enthusiastically by the local poor. I sent out via Facebook an internet link that residents could follow to give online feedback to the council over the prospect of having the store. This action produced a long list of comments in favour of the application for planners to take into consideration. Another struggle came in trying to persuade a Councillor to hold the community PACT meetings¹¹ in different parts of the ward, so that other residents would be encouraged to attend. Support was sought from the city's MP, leading to a decision to hold the PACT in different places. This did indeed bring new people to the meetings to communicate their concerns.

Starting a resident-led group

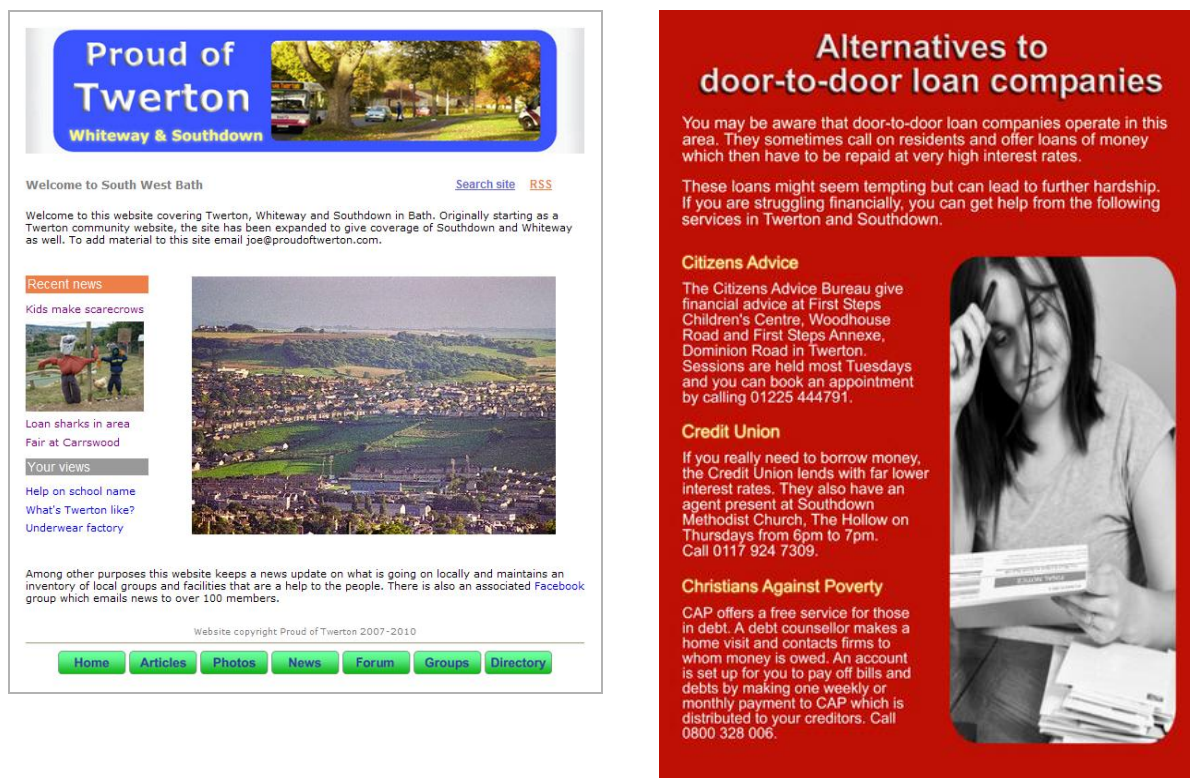
On seeing that there was little empowerment of local people, I suggested at a PACT meeting that a resident-led group be established to maintain a local limestone grassland hill and to organise some community activities there to generate social cohesion. A public meeting was arranged which attracted enough interested people to form the group. Events that followed included community walks, kite-making, litter picks and star gazing with an astronomer's group. A nature survey was organised which showed that we needed to apply for the hill to have Environmental Stewardship Status.

There is obviously some interplay between the above praxis and my thesis. My experiences in my own community brought to attention certain phenomena such as the stigmatisation of neighbourhoods which can undermine the confidence of residents, the capacity of grassroots individuals to effect change, and the indifference of people in authority towards grassroots participation. These concepts feature strongly in my case studies because I recognised the same phenomena in them too. Obviously there are implications for objectivity in this, as it could be claimed that I began the fieldwork with some biases. On the other hand it is arguably helpful to use praxis and case studies in tandem in this way, as it allows hands-on experience of community to guide the researcher as to what phenomena might be important. Moreover, an ethical problem arises when students believe in

¹¹A PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meeting gives residents the opportunity to discuss issues of concern with representatives from the police, the council and other partner agencies.

emancipatory ideas but have no praxis. One can end up making statements about people empowerment at seminars and conferences but without doing anything practical about it. Ideally my praxis would have been better performed in the form of action research in association with the churches that I studied, but opportunities for that model of research did not arise from within those communities.

Figure 1. My community website and flyer warning residents about high interest loan companies



Conclusion

In conducting case studies of churches that provide welfare services for their communities, I adopted an exploratory approach to discover what issues in this field were important. My research was ethnographic and employed mainly qualitative techniques to collect data on churches and their surrounding communities. The initial focus was on the strengths and weaknesses of church based welfare provision, relating to the organisational systems of churches comprising authority structures and human motivations. While studying these churches I was also able to extend my research design to learn about nearby community development projects. These projects, and features of church organisation that I saw, persuaded me to narrow my research focus to issues of participation and empowerment in the

church. The study of the third church offered some evidence that a theology of participation can underlie church activity, and gave opportunity to investigate potential strengths and weaknesses of a participatory approach in the churches.

Several points have to be made in assessing the overall soundness of my methodology. There was at least one occasion when I breached impartiality by voicing opinions which could have affected the responses of the faith groups towards me. I also experienced problems including a lack of strong opinion as to the idea of greater empowerment among many lay members, and constraints on available time to make the third case study. My personal values probably had some effect on my identification of which phenomena were important, and concepts arising from my own community action certainly did. I accept some of the critical realist position that my representations of reality may not be free of distortions caused by my own subjective processes, anticipating that my main weakness is in giving prominence to some themes over others. Despite these difficulties I feel that my conclusions are drawn reasonably from many lines of evidence and contain much general truth.

4. Case study of the Anglican parish church at Somerside

In this chapter I report on my case study of an Anglican church situated in a disadvantaged suburb of a provincial city. After outlining the demography of the area, I examine the authority structures and motivational factors that determine the activity of the church. I also look at two community empowerment schemes in the vicinity. The church's organisational system is discussed in light of the character of the area and the response of local people to the empowerment schemes. A conclusion is then drawn regarding the balance of power and fulfilment of skills that rests between church leaders, the laity and the wider community.

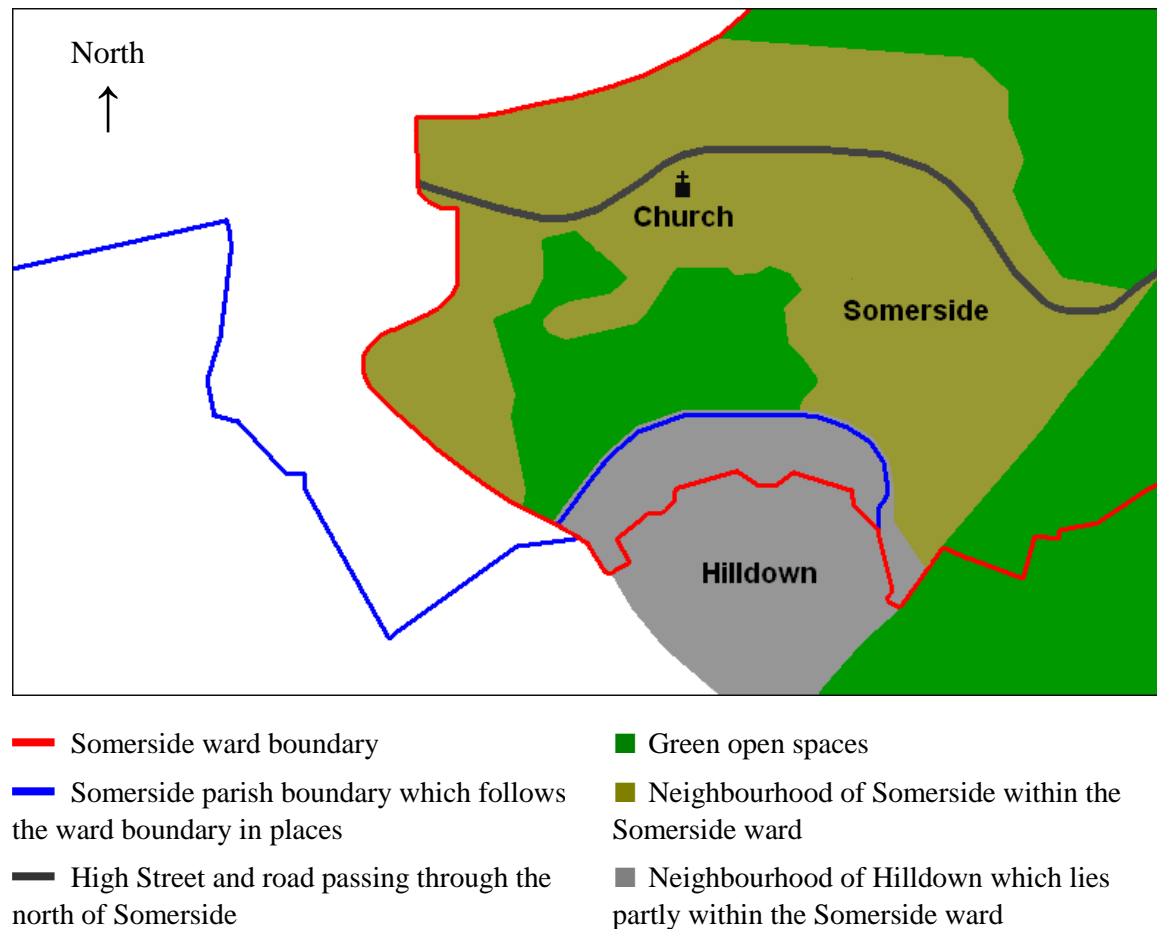
Demography of the area

The area that is Somerside originated as a village but evolved into a suburb of the nearby city with urban expansion in the 19th century followed by a series of post-war building programmes. At the time of my study, the housing tenure was roughly 80% council built and a social landlord had taken over the renting out of the homes. According to one of the Councillors for Somerside, there was an older community of people who had traditionally felt some sense of rootedness and positive feeling towards the area, but the predominance of social housing brought in waves of newcomers who did not necessarily connect with the neighbourhood in the same way. This was having an eroding effect on the local sense of community. The demography of the area was changing in other ways too. Escalating house prices resulted in a greater proportion of middle class residents choosing to settle in Somerside where homes were relatively low-priced. Apart from changes in class composition, it seemed unlikely that the population of Somerside would become very culturally diverse in the near future. When the last census was taken in 2001, only around 1% of the population were non-white and less than 1% identified with a religion other than Christianity (ONS 2001). Geographic boundaries in Somerside could be confusing. To the south was the parish boundary line, but the ward boundary extended further south again to encompass additional streets. A large council estate area, Hilldown, lay straddled between the Somerside ward and an adjoining ward, and was usually treated as a separate neighbourhood. Only a small part of the Hilldown Estate came under the parish of Somerside.

Statistical and qualitative evidences point to there being deprivation in the area. Government statistics made public in August 2000 showed the Somerside ward to have the highest level of multiple deprivation in the county, being the most deprived in terms of

income, employment, health and housing (but not on education or access to services). Somerside also ranked among the top 14% of wards experiencing multiple deprivation nationally. In 2003 the differential in life expectancies between the population of Somerside and that of a prosperous ward in the same city, was highlighted by a local newspaper. In it, a spokesperson for the Primary Care Trust revealed that people in the other ward could expect to live on average 6 years longer than people in Somerside. A Somerside Councillor replied that the findings did not surprise him and said that the area suffers from generational cycles of poverty stemming from young people leaving education too early to achieve good employment prospects. When the infant school invited the public to view its new health advice centre, I took the opportunity to talk to staff about local poverty. The school had joined the Government's Food for Life scheme (Food for Life Partnership 2008) which promotes healthy eating, and did its own research where staff met with parents and enquired why some children were given chocolate bars instead of fruit in their packed lunches. The answer was that parents on low incomes were resorting to 'buy one get one free' offers on multipacks of chocolate bars etc to make ends meet. Communications with retailers found that sweet manufacturers were actively exploiting the low economic prosperity of the area to promote their products. After receiving education on healthy eating from the school, some parents returned to using the school dinner system to feed their children, finding it too difficult to provide healthy packed lunches within the confines of their budget. Meanwhile, other parents were moving over to providing packed lunches, saying that they were unable to afford the £1.85 cost of school dinners. Of the 136 children attending the infant school, 66 (48.5%) were in receipt of free school meals as an indicator of financial hardship in the ward.

Figure 2. Map of the Somerside case study area



Evidences of deprivation in Somerside had attracted a large number of community agencies to provide welfare services in the area, and the type of services provided give some indications of the needs experienced there. For example, a debt-counselling service, credit union and financial advice sessions by the Citizen's Advice Bureau, supported people on low incomes to be financially solvent. Several preschool facilities were especially helpful for lone parents or families facing other pressures. And specialist workers were available for families affected by domestic violence and substance abuse. When a feasibility report for the possibility of setting up a Time Bank was undertaken, existing agencies were asked to detail the main problems in the area. Social exclusion and lack of community cohesion, low motivation and participation among residents, and poor confidence and self-esteem were identified as key concerns. Community agencies faced their own set of challenges and a couple of Community Link Coordinators that I interviewed spoke of the hardships that agencies encounter in ensuring the continuation of their services. Typically their work was closely inspected by funding organisations to check whether it was productive enough to

justify funding next year. Another problem was that while it was easy to attract funders to finance new projects, it was much harder to secure ongoing funding for salaries and running costs. Funders wanted to fund new projects. A further issue lay in the duplication of services at Somerside. Community agencies offering similar sorts of service undermined each other's progress and wasted resources. Partly with an aim to avoid this duplication of services, an interagency meeting was set up to keep agencies informed of what others were doing.

The Community Link Coordinators described Somerside as a place where it was hard to get residents engaged in organised activities, saying that efforts to make inroads into the community were hampered by local insularity and suspicion of outsiders. Lack of confidence among residents to interact with institutions seemed to be another obstacle. When a learning service started to run a computer skills course in a local pub, the courses proved so popular that 186 people signed up in the first year. Residents confessed to feeling more at ease learning in a pub environment than they would in a college. Further factors that restricted the involvement of residents with community agencies were to do with territoriality and mobility. According to the Community Link Coordinators, people were not prepared to receive services outside of a particular zone:

I think there do seem to be pockets of people who aren't tapping into any services. And it does seem to be very localised around here. So if you live at the bottom of the hill down here, you won't necessarily go to the top of the hill to receive services at Hilldown. Partly territorial, partly mobility issues. People won't travel. Kids won't travel from down here up to stuff at the Hilldown Community Centre because that's for Hilldown kids.

The Hilldown Community Centre was built to the south of the ward out of recognition that residents living there needed their own services nearby, but attempts to run social activities at the centre petered out, leaving the youth work as all that remained. A local Councillor gave territoriality and the steep hillside as reasons why residents in the southern half of the ward do not attend the PACT meeting, which is held in the north.

The neighbourhoods of Somerside and Hilldown suffered from a poor reputation and the stigmatisation of local cultures, possibly originating with attitudes towards newcomers who came from post-war slum clearances in the city (cf. Power 1999: 56). The poor reputation was evident in changes of place names such as the renaming of Hilldown Avenue (outside the area) to Combe Rise, as other city residents made efforts to disassociate from these

neighbourhoods. It was also the reason why the infant school struggled to attract enough parents to enrol their children there. The stigmatisation had a subjective effect as residents internalised the stereotypes that they heard. For example, it was noticeable that some locals hesitated before 'admitting' that they lived in certain a street with a bad image. A woman that I conversed with in a pub spoke of her distress at hearing outsiders telling jokes about Somerside. She had moved into the area and was unaccustomed to feeling part of a denigrated group. A Councillor told me that the language employed by Hilldown residents to discuss their neighbourhood was markedly more negative in tone than that used by residents of the neighbouring ward.

Skeggs' (1997) discovery of the phenomenon of 'disidentification' may explain the critical discourse used by the residents to describe their area. Skeggs found that her sample of working class women refused to define themselves as working class, due to stigmas of inferiority attached to their class background. Instead, the women redefined "working class" in such a way that excluded their own characteristics, thereby disidentifying with their own class and attempting to pass as middle class. When a teenager in Somerside heard a joke about her local culture she responded by saying, "Well I think Somerside's a bit crap anyway." Applying Skeggs' analysis, it seems as if the teenager was trying to remove herself from the stigmatised group by placing herself among the critics who look down on her neighbourhood. Such a process that causes individuals to disidentify with their own community could undermine community cohesion and the people's confidence in their abilities to effect change.

As in any community, residents of Somerside possessed skills, local knowledge and stocks of social capital. An example was seen in the single mothers who formed their own supportive friendship networks and shared information with each other. Residents who attended the PACT meetings employed their local knowledge in discussing community issues. Pub sports teams, such as football teams, were types of small scale resident-led initiatives that were sustainable and demonstrated the competence of residents in fields such as people organisation. Another example of a resident-led initiative was the Bingo Club that was run by an elderly citizen of Somerside. It appeared that residents would have plenty of assets to contribute to neighbourhood regeneration if given the chance.

The church at Somerside

Some initial points

The church at Somerside dates to medieval times and is a familiar landmark in the local surroundings. Situated near the High Street, it is passed by hundreds of people in a day. I found that it was still important for a few local people to have a child christened at the church or to be married there. That these ceremonies were once valued by a greater proportion of the community was evidenced by the way that local people treat the parish boundary (not the ward boundary) as the line demarcating where Somerside begins. Traditionally the parish boundary would determine whether a christening or wedding was to be conducted at Somerside or in another parish. Although some families found it meaningful to have a christening or wedding take place at the church, their motivation may not have followed the theology of the church, as the family was usually not seen at the church again. Billings (2004: 49-57) has uncovered a number of practical reasons why people decide upon a church wedding or christening, which could be true of Somerside residents. For example, a young mother might have a baby christened to make her partner more aware that their relationship has changed now that a child has been born.

A new Rector was appointed several years ago and began to update the church. A contemporary style of Sunday service became the norm, incorporating humour and vivid images displayed on a screen using PowerPoint. Modern songs and musical instruments including drums, electronic keyboards and guitars became dominant over the traditional hymns and church organ. These attracted new congregants seeking a particular type of worship which, together with the influx of middle class newcomers to Somerside, made for a more mixed congregation. Pastoral care within the church was usually good and I saw that when some members became unwell, a rota was established so that others could share the task of visiting them.

In addition to the church building, there were two other properties which were owned by the Somerside church. These provided a venue for the church's community services and were sometimes hired by community agencies. The church offered a Toddler Group and small Youth Cells for teenagers of different age categories. The church had also developed one of the properties into the Dahlia House community centre and café that opened on three days of the week. A big city centre church ran a children's club from the Somerside church, as it did in other churches around the city. Across the road was a home for the deaf, where clergy had held weekly devotional services for deaf people for many years. Some of the deaf

people were brought to attend Sunday worship at the church and a signer was employed to communicate the sermon in sign language. The church and its buildings were situated in the High Street, meaning that they once occupied a central position in Somerside. But with urban expansion, many residents now lived some distance away and did not travel to the High Street. Since the church's engagement with the local population took the form of community services offered from these buildings, it faced a similar problem to other agencies, in that territoriality and mobility issues probably contributed to some residents' disengagement from the church and its outreach.

Authority structures of the church at Somerside

The church at Somerside belongs to an Anglican diocese and its clergy are paid for by the diocese in return for its "parish share" or payment to the diocese. I found little evidence of the Bishop exerting influence over the activities of the church. Instead, the major elements of the church's work were articulated in the Sunday services as innovations decided by the church leaders. Effectively the Rector of the church could be placed at the top of the church hierarchy at Somerside. The Rector had a profound vision for social action, which included the church living in a manner worthy of its calling among the wider community and positively affecting the welfare of the people. The Rector's leadership style conformed to Max Weber's concept of a charismatic leader; that is, a leader possessing the extraordinary attributes to inspire a following of dedicated supporters so as to be able to initiate social change (Weber 1963: 2-3, 46-7; Hughes et al 2003: 112). Two lay members that I interviewed spoke of the Rector's personal charisms and ability to persuade and enthuse. For example:

He's very good at putting his point across. He's a very charismatic speaker and I suspect that if he hadn't been the Vicar he is, I probably wouldn't have stayed at the church. It's the way that he puts himself across and builds up an awful lot of enthusiasm for the projects he gets involved in. And it rubs off on other people. People are almost caught up in his wave of enthusiasm to do these good things.

During a discussion that followed a course on prayer, a newcomer to the church suggested that it was the Rector's personality that had caused the congregation to double in the space of about two years (although that person was corrected and given a theological explanation). The Sunday services were commonly used by the Rector to announce positive developments

such as increasing unity within the church and improvements to the church's work for the community. In the church's 2008 *Annual Report*, the Rector's two page review of the past year reiterated dozens of those themes:

The sense that we belong to a community has been tangibly growing ... There is a strong sense of inclusion and acceptance... New members are joining and belonging to the church... There is a steady increasing enthusiasm for worship... There has been a significant development of the Dahlia House Centre... Practical focus for transforming the area... Emphasis on celebration... New vision and increased church unity... We seem to have increased confidence in our message and faith... Giving to the church (in both time and money) is up.

It is easy to see how people can be caught up in this wave of enthusiasm delivered in the manner of a charismatic leader sweeping his audience along with his visionary outlook. In fact it is necessary for Weber's charismatic leader to present ongoing proofs of his powers to legitimate his position as a radical initiator of change (Hughes et al 2003: 112).

Below the Rector were two full time Outreach Directors, one of whom was an ordained Priest and led some of the Sunday services as well as managing the Dahlia House Centre. He was skilled in many areas such as the use of technology and constructed a community website to complement the church website. Together with his wife, who operated as the second Outreach Director, he was responsible for community engagement initiatives such as the church's involvement in Healthy Lifestyles Week¹². The outlook of the Outreach Directors seemed inseparable from that of the Rector who strongly endorsed their positions:

John and Karen have a big vision for Dahlia House and this year we are going to see that mature and expand. God has blessed us with resources for their employment for a reason... We want to continue to see Dahlia House become a centre for transformation, discipleship and mission (Annual Report 2008).

A fourth member of the team had the position of Reader, as one who was licensed by the Bishop to preach or help organise the services. She was the longest established of all the clergy at Somerside, but her preaching role had been somewhat displaced by the male

¹² An event in which local community agencies, schools, churches and other organisations put on a week of health related activities for the public to attend.

Outreach Director who frequently alternated with the Rector in leading Sunday worship. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) was made up of the clergy and church members elected by the congregation, and cooperated with the Rector in promoting the church's pastoral, evangelistic and social mission. The PCC met bi-monthly and the meetings could be attended by any member of the church. Only the elected members of the PCC and the Rector were permitted to speak or contribute towards decisions made.

Since there was no regular forum whereby the whole congregation might participate in discussions determining the actions of the church, decision-making was mainly confined to a few selected individuals. However, there was an Annual Quarterly Meeting (AGM) where any member of the church could turn up and put their views across. Another structure that should have theoretically offered some empowerment of the laity was the PCC with its inherent representative democracy. In reality it seemed that neither of these structures bestowed much empowerment.

In the case of the AGM, the point is illustrated by the one that I attended and the developments which followed. I found that the meeting was not particularly conducive to discussion and I was uncertain how far there was genuine interest in the perspectives of the lay members. Early on in the meeting the congregation had the task of electing new members to the PCC, as several existing members were about to stand down. A number of people had put themselves forward for election but were not given the opportunity to make any sort of speech that would outline their principles and help others to make their choice. The whole process was done mechanically and in silence. Most of the AGM consisted of presentations of the leadership's half-made decisions and budget for the next year. When the lay members were invited to discuss topics, the conversation was tightly regulated so that exchanges amounted to atomised statements from persons seated in rows more than an interactive discussion. When a difference of opinion emerged over the correct method of evangelism, the Rector quickly said that this was a topic that could be discussed afterwards and moved the meeting on. The church's *Annual Report* was given out during the meeting, but the length and complexity of the document would make it impossible for lay members to analyse and discuss in depth at the meeting. Even with retrospect it was difficult to clarify some of the information. For example it could be determined that the Dahlia House Centre had been allocated more than £50,000 in funds. But since this figure included half the salaries of the Outreach Directors, which were undisclosed, it could not be ascertained how much investment had gone towards the building itself or its fittings and equipment etc. One of the more vocal lay members did actually question the amount of expenditure on the Dahlia

House Centre, asking to be given a breakdown of where the money was being spent. Although he was assured that he would be given such a breakdown, many months later he had not received it. In these ways lay members seemed like silent partners of a business run by executive officers, rather than people capable of taking on responsibilities.

At the AGM I asked if the laity might be better informed of future plans, and that their input could be sought more often. A member of the PCC who was about to stand down seconded these points. In response there followed several weeks of church sermons on how the contribution of every believer was important. One of the sermons taught that all Christians together make up a priesthood serving God. Then the congregation were given cards to jot down their ideas for the church and hand them in. During another church service, everyone was invited to write their hopes for the area on slips of paper and pin them onto large flags as a form of visual prayer. There was also an attempt to make information more available, inasmuch as the minutes of PCC meetings were pinned to the noticeboard to be read. Then all the emphasis on the contribution of the laity ended and the church continued to follow the same top-down pattern of activity as before. The church took part in the Hope 08 initiative – a project in which churches across the country were organising community welfare events. Several efforts were made, including two litter picks and a project where the church painted some children's play equipment and arranged a small football tournament in a park. No discussion was invited from the laity as to what they would like to do for Hope 08. For Healthy Lifestyles Week the Outreach Directors organised a cookery class and meal, followed by a healthy barbecue, but again these activities were decided without input from the laity. It therefore became difficult to attach significance to those church sermons that had emphasised the value of everybody's input. There seemed to be little desire to put that philosophy into practice.

It was also unclear how far the Parochial Church Council offered much in the way of empowerment. Lay members did have power to elect individuals to the PCC to help make decisions on their behalf. But the influx of newcomers to Somerside and the tendency for many churchgoers to travel in from outside the area, as well as the disinclination of working class members to put themselves forward for election, meant that candidates tended to be unrepresentative of the indigenous culture. Residing on the PCC were the Rector and the two Outreach Directors who had very different social class backgrounds to most local people. The Rector's wife also held a place, as did a friend of the Rector who came across from another city. Two more members travelled in from a town located about 5 miles away. Then there was the Reader who lived in a private housing development in Somerside, and a retired

teaching professional. Only two members of the PCC whose spouses were employed in manual trades have clear commonalities to the populations of the housing estates. This composition may have meant that the PCC represented newcomers or outsiders more than it did the indigenous people of Somerside.

In the absence of the laity's participation in decisions, a non-democratic pattern of activity was achieved. According to Weber, charismatic leadership favours spontaneous action and is disinterested in the smaller details of how plans are carried out; contrasting with the stability and predictability of bureaucratic styles of decision-making (Hughes et al 2003: 113). The way that charismatic leadership at the Somerside church was associated with fast paced change and absence of bureaucratic deliberations met this definition. One interviewee compared the church's system of management with his own work as a Project Manager:

It's very, very unstructured in a lot of cases. When the Rector talks about what he wants to do in Dahlia House it's a case of, "We're just going to dig that flower bed up here and pave over here, and pull a garage up there, and put a shed up here" and I'm thinking, "Where's the plans for this? Where's all the paperwork, the building materials?" And it's a case of, "Well, it'll all just turn up." But by in large they make the announcements in church, do the requests and people turn up, the equipment turns up and the work gets done.

The result was that new projects and initiatives could be quickly assembled. The church then had the potential to respond quickly to needs in the community or a new set of ideas, committing volunteers, premises and resources in a short space of time.

Sometimes proactive behaviour could proceed from the laity. There was an understanding that an individual may approach the Rector with an aim to set up a new initiative and be given support. The church's work with teenagers began in this way, when a middle class couple who had set up home in Somerside wanted to do some youth work. Later a paid youth worker was employed to continue the work that they had started. In such instances the spontaneity and freedom of the leadership's decision-making process transferred to the lay member in that they were supported to establish a project without having to endure a lengthy bureaucratic process. The system could thereby empower lay members to apply their skills and knowledge to a situation that they saw in their community, although cases of bottom-up initiatives were relatively rare.

The deference of the laity

On the whole the lay members seemed disinclined to become involved in decision-making processes, and in previous years it had been hard to get many people to attend the Annual General Meeting. This passivity of the congregation could be attributed to mechanisms which reinforce the authority of the leaders and generate deference among the laity. Mechanisms reinforcing the authority of the leaders may include a belief that the path of the faithful is to focus on spiritual issues rather than political ones. A young woman that I spoke with at a home group felt that Christianity was about one's relationship with God and had little to do with empowering the laity at the decision-making level. She was bemused when I suggested that the very concept of believers being in relationship with God could hint at the whole congregation having status and inspiration to warrant their input in decisions made. Back in the 1980s Bishop David Sheppard argued that the Anglican Church's preoccupation with the personal encounter with God obscures the reality that God is found in the marginalised people of society. The focus on relationship with the Deity somehow causes church leaderships to overlook his 'presence' in what he has given low status people to contribute (1982: 158).

Then there are Weber's theories of charismatic authority and traditional authority, with Harris (1998: 168) noting that a church leader will have a measure of both. Weber's theory also allows for the Rector's charismatic authority to be bestowed upon his immediate followers to create a charismatic group. The power of charismatic authority to instil obedience and dedication to the charismatic group could explain some of the deference to the church leadership at Somerside. The complimentary factor of traditional authority means that customs and beliefs uphold the supremacy of the leadership. Traditional authority may underlie the use of collective terms such as "we" and "our" in the church sermons. Church leaders at Somerside would speak for the whole congregation by saying, "We want to do this... our vision is that..." with the assumption that the laity would automatically take ownership of plans that were handed down. Traditional authority led to an institutionalisation of the church hierarchy which was expressed in various forms. On the church website a history of qualifications and accomplishments legitimating the positions of the Rector and Outreach Directors were written in detail, while the people that make up the main congregation were scarcely given a mention. When the next PCC meeting was due, an image was displayed on the PowerPoint screen in church showing a football team huddled together, discussing tactics and with their backs turned towards the spectators. The subjective message conveyed was that decisions belong to the leaders and others are rightly excluded.

Figure 3. Photograph like the one shown when a PCC meeting is announced



Mechanisms that generate deference among the laity might include Reed's (1969: 34-5) concept of "creative regression". Reed looks upon creative regression as an extra-dependent state that adults enter into at church, in order to realise the hope that they derived from attachment to their parents as infants. When a fuse blew one Sunday morning, putting the church in semi-darkness, an electrician in the congregation sat still for a couple of minutes waiting to be asked to help. Arguably his "extra-dependent state" did not permit him to immediately come forward and use his autonomy as one qualified to tackle the problem, as he would have done in other circumstances. Harris (1998: 604-10) suggests that lay members of churches can exhibit similar attitudes to members of voluntary associational organisations. Lay members feel free to participate as it suits them, do not expect to be told what to do, and may exercise ambivalent attitudes towards paid staff. Meanwhile the clergy are expected to be interpreters of the church's mission and treat church life as central. Harris' model allows for lay members to be consumers of religious goods provided by the church, without being so interested in decisions as to want to contribute their own views.

An alternative to these explanations would be the community development view, that experiences of powerlessness in life, leaves most grassroots people lacking the self-belief to think that they can make a difference (Beresford and Croft 1993: 1-2, 56-7). This may explain the trend in which working class individuals at Somerside are generally less involved in decision-making than others in the congregation – a pattern that was sometimes commented upon in Harris' case studies of congregations (1998: 99). Part of the explanation could be that the working-class occupations often involve little autonomy and much

deference given to middle-class managers and professionals. According to some community development views, institutions such as the media and the school system reinforce ideologies of who should be empowered to make changes and who should not. Perhaps the Somerside church has its own hidden mechanisms that generate deference, as mentioned earlier. From the community development perspective, the answer is to encourage individuals to develop their own empowering narratives about themselves and to believe in their abilities.

Although it was hard to find strongly expressed views on participation from the laity, I did come across some evidence in conversations that a more inclusive decision-making process might be preferred. A couple of respondents spoke in pragmatic terms about how the leadership were resolved to follow their plans and there was little anyone could do to stop them. One individual, who gave much time in support of the church's work, expressed his frustration that "the Rector gets an idea and then you can't talk him out of it". He resented the way that a Bingo club which hired one of the church buildings had to find alternative premises when the Rector came up with a new purpose for that building. When asked whether he could take his concerns to another leader, his impression was that "they're all in it together". Another man said that he had once been told that "church is a theocracy and not a democracy" but felt that this view did not seem right to him.

Motivating factors at the Somerside church

The Charismatic movement (theological not Weberian) was influential among the leadership and some lay members, cohering with evidence that the Charismatic movement has taken root in many Anglican churches (Francis et al 2000: 121). This certainly seemed to be the case in other churches across the city as well. Francis et al (ibid) note from Goldingay (1996) that Charismatic influenced churches exhibit the following features:

There is a clear beginning of the Christian life which commonly takes the form of being filled with the spirit. The ongoing Christian life is aware of the sense of the presence and power of God, a joy in God and an enthusiasm about God. God is involved with the world in an interventionist sense, changing and healing. The Christian community is open to God, who acts guided and speaks to the church. Charism based ministry has priority over office-based ministry.

Goldingay also contrasts Charismatic Christianity which welcomes the experience of God, with the preceding evangelical movement that has warned believers not to be led too much by personal feelings and sensations (1996: 179-80).

At Pentecost the Rector held a plastic cup under water to demonstrate the kind of filling with the Spirit to aim for. The lesson was that Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit to the same degree as the plastic cup immersed in the water. Statements from the Rector and the Outreach Director, often stressed what God was thought to be saying to the church or doing in the parish. One way that belief in an interventionist God was conceptualised, was found in ideas to do with the kingdom of God breaking in at Somerside. The kingdom was greatly emphasised by the Rector and the Outreach Directors and was presented as a framework for the church's mission of care for the community. In an interview, the male Outreach Director put it this way:

I would be saying, "Right God, you've given me these gifts and these gifts are nurturing and growing. How can I therefore best use these gifts to establish your kingdom as I understand your kingdom to be? And so as I understand God's kingdom to be a place where people are loved, then I will seek to love them. If I see that God's kingdom is a place where people are healed, then I will deliver that by medical means or miraculous means or whatever.

I tried to find the connection between Charismatic theology and social concern, as other Charismatic influenced churches in the same city featured a proliferation of community services. One explanation might be that Charismatic theology and social concern were destined to merge. By the 1980s many Anglican clergy were claiming that after being filled with the Holy Spirit, God was working with them to a greater extent (Gunstone 1982: 154). In the same decade the Anglican Church published its report *Faith in the City* (Archbishop of Canterbury's Urban Priorities Commission 1985) pinpointing the most disadvantaged urban areas and challenging churches to take action. Arguably it was only a matter of time before churches began to address community needs with a special emphasis on spiritual phenomena guiding the work. Another explanation to emerge in my case study was that churches in the city had lost confidence in preaching as a means to win converts. A Christian trust with staff employed from many local churches, provided a range of welfare services such as a low cost furniture project. A Street preaching team that comprised a wing of the trust had experienced a lack of support. A meeting was held with the Trust Manager who revealed that the city's

churches preferred welfare provision as a means of outreach, feeling that open air preaching was no longer effective at winning people over.

In conversation with the Rector I was directed to the American theologian Darrell Guder as an influence on his understanding of church. Guder maintains that the church should minister to people by being ready to do the work that God calls it to do. Guder is critical of American churches that adopt the performance related style of secular organisations. Rather than being driven by an instrumental purpose to provide services, the help that a church gives should arise out of its calling to be a holy nation before God:

As our church organizations have centralized, they have become oriented to productivity, efficiency, success, statistics, and public relations, and this orientation has often proved detrimental to the church's missional identity and calling. In contrast to contemporary understanding of the church as voluntary association, chaplain to society, or vendor of religious goods and services, one of the most important understandings of the church in the New Testament is a political one: the church as holy nation (Guder 1998: 253).

The church leaders at Somerside believed in spiritual phenomena that God used to call the church to mission. Some of these phenomena were visions from God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and “gifts” or special abilities that God gave to individuals. One such vision has been the image of a red carpet stretching through the High Street at Somerside – a picture that flashed into the mind of an individual at a prayer meeting. The vision was interpreted as the church preparing the community for the kingdom of God by caring for local people and readying them to meet the person of Jesus Christ. The vision of the red carpet was recreated using a graphics software package and was regularly displayed as a flagship of the church's work on the screen in church (see figure 4 overleaf). Some accompanying graphics were added as well. In pictorial form the red carpet was shown continuing along the High Street and a grey photograph of a house changed into vivid colour to symbolise the transformation that was to take place. A belief that God was calling the faithful to make the neighbourhood a better place is clearly a powerful motive.

The Holy Spirit was believed to guide the church in an unseen manner so that the congregation could accurately carry out its calling. On this point the difference between the community development definition of empowerment and the Charismatic definition was clear. A section on the church website treated empowerment as the power that comes from

the Holy Spirit and which enabled Christians to perform ministries. The focus is upon Spirit empowered proactivity more than democratic process, which may help to explain why church leaders were inclined to vigorously follow their own plans rather than seeking a more participatory approach. At the Somerside church, gifts were another important component influencing the way that the church targeted certain areas of need. As the Rector put it:

If someone can do something, they get to do it quite quickly. So I think because of that, lots of people get involved quite quickly, which is great. But I think it's not very organised or structured, it's very fluid... It's quite evolving.

Figure 4. Picture similar to the one used to depict the vision of the red carpet through Somerside¹³



I found a decline in theological interpretations as one moved from the church leadership to the laity. For some lay members the idea of the church called to mission did not seem to be the main motivating force. When asked to account for the amount of community service that proceeds from the church, one respondent said, “I think that could be down to one thing and that’s the Rector. I think he’s just the sort of guy who genuinely wants to help and make the world around him a much, much better place.” Two lay members that I interviewed seemed unclear as to whether the vision of the red carpet displayed in church had originated from God. The important thing was the social care implicit in its message:

¹³ Created using a photograph taken somewhere else in Britain.

Lay member 1: I see what we're doing as a good thing in helping the community. Whether I see it as inspiration from God... I don't know. I think a lot of the time God lets us get on with life as we see fit, as long as we are trying to help our fellow man.

Lay member 2: I like the image of the red carpet. I like that as an idea, as a concept... I think getting involved with the projects that the church is initiating, for want of a better word, is "good".

These comments reflect Etzioni's normative compliance structure, in which the moral values that govern the activity of the organisation also secure the members' commitment to the organisation (Etzioni 1998: 88). Torry (2005: 101) makes note of Kavagy's (1992) theory that some areas of church life are governed with the authority structures identified by Weber, while others are governed by normative compliance structures. This seemed to roughly fit the Somerside church, with the Rector and the PCC performing leadership roles with their traditional, bureaucratic or charismatic authority types, and the laity sometimes prepared to help serve the community out of compliance with the church's moral norms. Where there was too little support for initiatives, charismatic appeal was brought to bear. The last event for Hope 08 was preceded by an impassioned appeal in which the Rector spoke of feeling "broken" because he could not obtain the level of help needed to fulfil his ambitions. The result was that a proportion of people from the church turned up to lend their support.

Community empowerment schemes in the area

The Time Bank compared with the church

I devised a door-to-door questionnaire to compare the impact of the Somerside church with a community agency of similar size and operating in the same ward, namely, the Time Bank. As well as enabling people to share time and skills helping one another, the Time Bank had several voluntary groups including a DIY and decorating team and a gardening team to help people. Its philosophy was to empower the community to address its own needs through the collective sharing of skills and time that residents have to offer. It had once been part of a larger organisation whose aim had been to create more sustainable communities. This organisation had collapsed in the recession but the Time Bank was able to secure funding from another source.

I found that a grid line on a map divided Somerside into equal northern and southern halves. So I used it to mark on each questionnaire whether a respondent lived in the northern or southern half. I devised two variables which asked on a scale on 1 to 10 how far people had used any of the work by the Time Bank and the church. I found a negative correlation between residents living in the southern half of the ward and having used any of the work by the church ($r = -.156$, $p = .006$).¹⁴ This I attribute to the mobility and territoriality issues mentioned earlier in this chapter, bearing in mind that the services run by the church are all located in the northern half of the ward.

I asked how far people would use work by the Time Bank and the church in the future, giving a brief overview of both their services. Overall, people indicated that they would be more unlikely to use the church than the Time Bank. On a scale of 1 to 10, 49.8% of people gave the figures “1” or “2” to indicate that they would be unlikely to use the Time Bank. The corresponding figure for the church was 57.5%, meaning that more people would be unlikely to use the church. There was a positive correlation between people living in the southern half of the ward and likelihood of using the Time Bank ($r = .154$, $p = .007$) but no similar correlation for the church.

The findings of the questionnaire may be tentatively treated as evidence for the popularity of the idea of community self-help, as the quantitative data showed that residents would be more likely to use the work of the Time Bank than the church. This was supported by qualitative statements that people made, with many individuals approving the Time Bank’s principle of supporting residents to help each other. The correlation between people living in the south of the ward and likelihood of using the Time Bank is possibly due to there being fewer services in that part of Somerside. In contrast, the work of the church had insufficient appeal to counter issues of mobility and territoriality so as to produce a similar correlation.

The work of the Rejuvenate Trust at Hilldown

Following a spate of burglaries, car attacks and other problems, there began a two year neighbourhood regeneration project on the Hilldown Estate. It was found that the community at Hilldown felt isolated on the top of the hill and people living nearby did not want to be part of it, resulting in a lack of confidence. A former SRB funded project had not met the requirements of people who needed it most, including single parents and unemployed

¹⁴ Using Spearman’s rho.

families. Funds had been expended by agencies from outside the area which convinced the board that their services were needed without actually finding a need for them in the community. This had resulted in widespread distrust of the process among residents. For this reason, the Local Strategic Partnership decided upon a community development that would engage with the community in a real sense. The successful applicant to carry out the scheme, the Rejuvenate Trust, was selected for its grassroots approach and years of experience listening to communities and supporting them to develop their own initiatives. This approach brought criticism from community agencies who felt excluded from the process, but it was opted for in view of past attempts that had failed to win the support of the people.

A Councillor for Hilldown whom I interviewed, explained that community engagement is difficult to do because a lot of residents do not trust any branch of officialdom. Another problem was that when authorities had attempted to make inroads into a community, their approach was still not grassroots enough. He gave a description of how half-measures to involve residents in regeneration went wrong:

When councils do consultations, they hire a room in a hall and then send out flyers inviting people to a meeting. And so the first thing that happens is people don't actually read bits of paper that come through their door. There's actually a significant number of households where there is a lack of ability to read a bit of paper anyway. So you're actually discriminating against those that don't read, those that don't engage and those that don't want to know. So what happens is you get the self-selecting coming along to a meeting, rather than really getting into the community.

And the way councils and the police and other people do this, is they start off by putting up posters about "what you'd like to see". People can easily generate a wish list, and so from that comes an inability to deliver that wish list. Therefore you get a feeling of disengagement, a feeling of disempowerment and a feeling that, "You've asked us what we wanted, we told you, and you didn't do anything about it anyway."

Where the approach of the Rejuvenate Trust differed was that collective consultations did not begin until good relationships had been built up. The first months were spent with a single worker knocking on doors, talking to the people and finding out what they wanted.

His task was to build up trust and confidence and to work alongside the residents. It was not about telling people what to do but empowering residents to work together in building up ideas which could be delivered in partnership. Families that had been retreating behind closed doors at night were engaged with and encouraged to come out and take ownership of problems. A clean up operation to remove large refuse items had 300 voluntary hours put into it by residents working in collaboration with the council. Part of the operation involved a residents' initiative to remove unwanted tyres and fill them with soil to grow food bearing plants. That they could deliver such a big project resulted in a great confidence boost for the community. New projects materialised and more families were prepared to talk to the council and ask things of them, gaining a better understanding how the council works. To local people it was important to have power to change things for themselves. When the Rejuvenate Trust held a seminar to explain its approach to other organisations, a resident spoke emotionally of her desire to set up activities for children to dispel their feelings of boredom and resentment.

Other projects that Hilldown residents produced were encouraging. Some teenagers organised a charity football tournament to raise money for new goalposts to be installed in the playing field, and residents organised a petition for a 20mph speed limit to be introduced to the estate. Two residents raised the funds to organise a music project with local teenagers, and some young people developed their own drama group to explore how they were affected by perceptions of youth and their estate. A team of residents formed to negotiate the renovation of the local play area and to organise community events there. The first event, a fun day, raised more than £800 for community projects. Some young men were supported to set up a gardening business as social enterprise, with a focus on keeping the gardens tidy on the estate. A residents' association eventually formed and a 35% drop in crime on the estate was attributed to the community development projects. The Councillor that I interviewed believed that all residents could contribute to the development of their neighbourhood:

Everyone's got skills they can contribute. I've got no doubt about that. Everyone has something they can bring to the table. What we have got to do is make sure everyone's contribution is valued and appreciated, and work out that different people bring different skills and nounce.

One of the long-term aims was to empower residents to continue the work after the helping hand of Rejuvenate was gone. During the second half of the scheme, residents were taken to

see projects that the trust had supported elsewhere. This stage provided encouragement and learning through seeing how other communities identified problems and successfully implemented their own solutions.

The bottom up approach of the Rejuvenate Trust in finding solutions to local needs, contrasted somewhat with the style of the church at Somerside. The facilitators of this work were confident that local people had the skills, knowledge and ideas to collectively improve quality of life in the neighbourhood, whereas in the church there was a stronger emphasis on certain figures having been appointed and gifted by God to lead outreach projects, with the rest of the congregation following and giving help. Since the Rejuvenate Trust had been very effective at making inroads into the community, it was interesting to contemplate what the church could learn from their manner of community engagement.

Effects of the organisational system of the Somerside church

Strongly driven leadership and rapid adaptation

A number of interrelated motivations and authority structures at the Somerside church combined to produce a strongly driven, top-down pattern of organisation capable of producing rapid change. A view that God was calling the church to serve the community served as a powerful motivational force for the leaders and some of the congregation. This is a motive which may intensify when a church believes that it is experiencing a calling through supernatural phenomena such as visions and the prompting of the Holy Spirit as emphasised in Charismatic theology. The tendency for a Charismatic leader (Weberian sense) to inspire a following so as to override bureaucracy and bring rapid transformation is also a significant force. The hierarchical structure of the Anglican system assisted the leaders to dictate the activity of the church. Some lay members were pleased to support the leaders' plans out of appreciation of their social concern, if not their spiritual outlook. Factors that produced deference among some of the congregation include those processes identified by Reed and Harris, as well as disempowering experiences identified by community development. But the result was that it was possible to transform the church from an institution that had minimal engagement with the wider community to one that engaged through an increased range of community services. In North America the churches that are most likely to develop service attitudes are those with middle class congregations, but which are located in the vicinity of deprived neighbourhoods. The reason seems to be that these

congregations have the resources to help and are situated where needs are very visible (Chaves 2004 cited by Wuthnow 2006: 52). If the same is true for Britain, then the Somerside church may be performing the function of recruiting middle class newcomers to the area and turning them into service providers for the community.

Top-down leadership and incomplete understanding of needs

The way that the lay people had so little involvement in decision-making was a striking feature of the Somerside church. A new emblem for the Dahlia House Café was presented in church one morning, with no input having been sought from the volunteers at the café over the design of the emblem. A page on the church website bore the title “Our Vision” but only narrated the Rector’s personal vision for change in Somerside. Even social gatherings were predetermined by the leaders, with no input from the laity as to where they would like to meet or go. A decision was made to establish a toddler group to be led by the female Outreach Director. This would sit alongside an existing toddler group managed by some unemployed lay people at the church. Strangely this new toddler group was held about 40 yards away from the existing toddler group and on the same morning. This upset the leader of the existing toddler group who felt that the initiative would undermine her work. Ultimately the new toddler group failed to attract users and was scrapped, but its example shows how an ambitious top-down leadership can walk over people and their contributions to the community.

When the church launched its Wednesday Meal for elderly people at the Dahlia House Café, the attraction was a quality meal and a mug of tea for £5. The meal was to be better than the sort served on Thursdays and was therefore more expensive. However, a mile up the road, a Methodist Centre was offering a similar meal for £2.50. A Methodist worker said that the Wednesday meal at the café seemed too expensive for the area and for pensioners. A related problem was that many elderly users of the café may not have been able to afford to eat out twice in a week, meaning that the Wednesday meal did not strictly make a new service available to them. The Somerside church had among its congregation some pensioners, unemployed people, and people on low incomes who could have given advice on affordability if their input was sought. Local lay members might also have had a better grasp of the indigenous culture, so as to be able to guide the church’s interactions with the community. A project to paint some artwork for the walls of Dahlia House Café was organised by the female Outreach Director. But instead of allowing participants to create their own themes, she instructed everyone to paint in the style of an obscure modern artist

whose work she liked. She even selected the colours for each individual to use. Modern art seemed a non-empathetic choice for a café in an area consisting largely of social housing. One lay member refused to be told what to paint and instead produced an attractive portrait of a dahlia. When it was hung up, customers at the café kept commenting that of all the paintings, the dahlia was the one that they would like to have in their own home.

The church leaders could have been challenged over a lack of consultation with the wider community. If the self-help principle in the work of the Time Bank was more popular as an idea than the work of the church, how good were church leaders at second guessing what the community wanted or needed? I noticed that members who had been elected to the PCC did not attend the Somerside PACT meetings to find out about issues that residents were raising. One of the Outreach Directors would often be the sole representative from the church. Given that most members of the PCC came from outside the area, it seemed odd not to use the PACT meetings as a source of information. Problems could arise if leaders only gather their understanding of needs from spiritual phenomena without listening to the community itself. In one of my interviews a member of the PCC talked about local needs. The term “pastoral support” was used many times to refer to a vague philosophy of care that never considered the potential for local people to be agents of their own self-help:

I think there's a lack of pastoral support and I'm very interested in pastoral support; in helping people where there's genuine need. And there's a lot of genuine need in Somerside. I'm particularly interested in how I can be a support to people and also how the church can be a support to people in a pastoral way and be put in a pastoral foundation to be able to support those people... I think as people get to know we have a genuine desire to help people, then that pastoral work will be taken up...

The charismatic leadership style of the Rector had both positive and negative implications for pastoral care. Some individuals had been attracted to the church by the personality of the Rector and were thus brought into an environment where they could perhaps receive support from other church members. On the other hand, I discovered two individuals did not relate so well to the new leader as they had to the former. One lady said that she had been able to confide personal problems to the former Rector but could not do so with the new one. Another individual, a teenage girl, had felt similarly and had left the church. Charismatic authority in the Somerside church did not motivate all people to follow a leader's vision for

change and could occasionally compromise some services such as counselling that clergy traditionally provide and that do not require personal charisma.

Some empowerment of the laity

At the Somerside church I saw one or two individuals appear more confident after attending the church for a time. The change could be due to feelings of acceptance and self-worth instilled by being welcomed into the faith community. Through activities such as befriending and encouraging, as well as teaching on the worth of human beings as God's creation, the church could raise the confidence of people in its congregation. There was a need for volunteers to fulfil certain roles like serving in the café. In this way the church provided a framework enabling local people to do something to help their community, which again, could result in feelings of self-worth. The only service managed by lay members of the church was the Toddler Group which had run for many years. For this, the church provided a venue to meet as well as funds for children's equipment. There was also an understanding that any member of the church could approach the Rector with an idea for a new initiative and obtain support for it. One example of this was a coffee morning that an individual had tried to set up, mainly with the elderly members of the church. Another example was the small youth group that a couple had organised in her home, prior to the church taking on a paid youth worker. Thus there were observable elements of empowerment within the church.

The congregation as voluntary labour

A common tendency was for church leaders think up projects and then go about enlisting the support of the congregation. Essentially the congregation became a voluntary labour force needed by the leadership to fulfil its plans. Exclusion from decision-making processes could cause the skills and knowledge of the laity to get overlooked, while lay members might assume that their ideas are unimportant if discussions involving the whole congregation are held only once per year at the AGM. From the leadership's perspective, the "gifts" of the laity were like a resource pool that could be tapped to support their latest plans.

This system contrasted with the approach of the Rejuvenate Trust on the Hilldown Estate, whose work caused residents to see that their own skills, knowledge and ideas were important and that they had capacity to start up their own initiatives for the community. Ordinarily there was widespread reticence among residents to get involved in the running of a project. As one of the Community Link Coordinators observed:

It's like people are happy to turn up to events that have already been organised, but they're not necessarily happy to turn up to committees. You get a certain group of people doing everything.

The results achieved by the Rejuvenate Trust suggested that this reticence could be overcome. When speaking with a resident, the Rejuvenate worker asked if there is anything that they would like to see happen in the area. If the resident then communicated a particular idea, the worker asked if they would like to meet with some other residents who hold similar interests. A meeting would be held, which could then lead to a residents' collection forming to manage a new project together.

Quality and sustainability of initiatives

There was no doubt that the work of the church had some improving effect on people's quality of life. For example a worker at the Dahlia House Café commented on how this amenity brought people into contact with others and gave them some sense of belonging. Two elderly ladies said that they loved coming to the café and felt that going there was the highlight of their week. Parents of the children who attended the children's club, reported on how their child's behaviour and school performance had improved since they had been going to the club. And the church youth groups provided a forum for young people to receive some attention who, due to reasons of territoriality, would not normally walk up the hill to make use of the youth club on the Hilldown Estate.

The work of the church also seemed more sustainable than that of other agencies which often struggled to secure enough funding to continue. The Community Link Coordinators that I interviewed thought that churches had less trouble in obtaining funds and were able to recruit volunteers from their congregations.¹⁵ I was told of the vicious circle where agencies strive to secure funding when they should be publicising their services, with the result that too few people take up those services to make a strong case for funding the next time around. A Community Link Coordinator described the likely situation for an initiative launched by a community agency and funded by a secular organisation:

They'd probably set it up on a 6 month trial basis or possibly a year, employ somebody to try to advertise it, plough a bit of money into the advertisements –

¹⁵ In 2008 the church at Somerside derived £19,000 through "planned giving" and another £10,500 through "collections and other giving", with other sums coming from the renting out of church buildings.

stuff like that. It would be totally monitored then for the next 12 months and if it didn't come up with a certain number of people through the door that they thought was viable, they'd drop it.

The above description differed from the church, where financial self-sufficiency, ownership of buildings and voluntary workers, mean that an initial low service use did not always cause a project to shut down.¹⁶ When the Dahlia House Café attracted few customers for the first 6 months, volunteers from the church were able to stay with the project until it became a success. As a worker in the café remembered:

For about the first six months the volunteers would go and nobody would come. Or maybe one or two people from the church would come to cheer us up. But some of us said, "Well everything takes a long time to pick up and for people to become aware of it." Gradually it got going.

Duplication, constrained vision and colonialisation

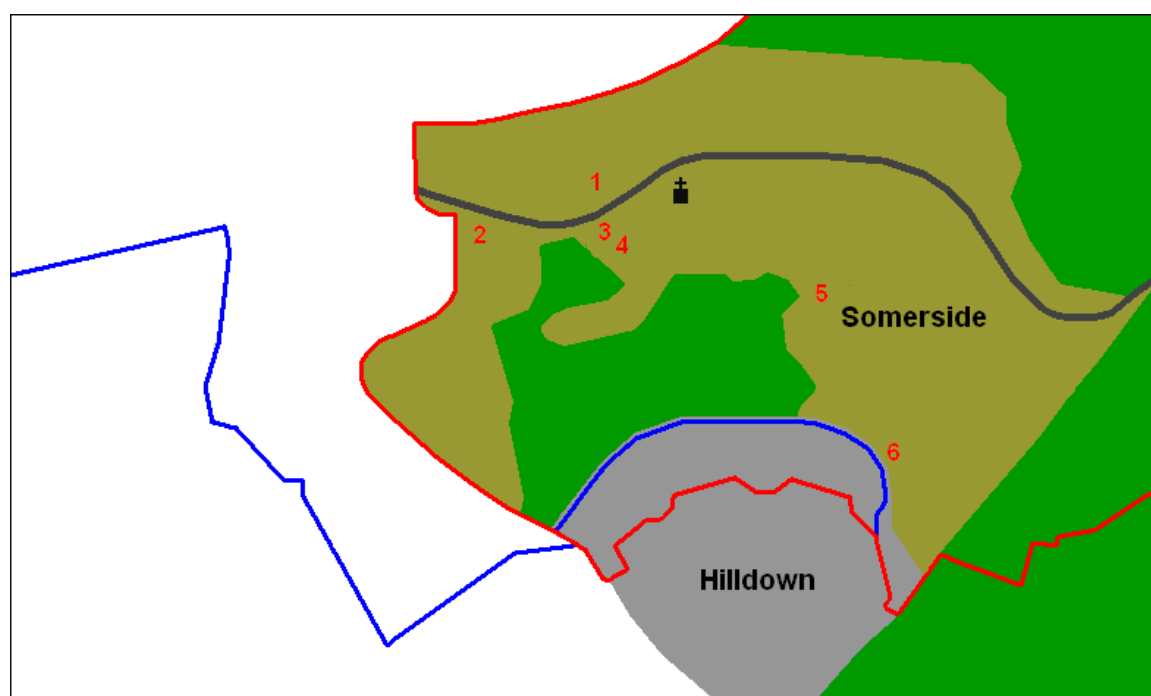
The Somerside church invested a lot of capital and labour in providing services that already existed within the parish. One of the main thrusts of the work was to maximise the Dahlia House Centre as a community building and café. However, another popular café, just across the road from the Dahlia House Centre, was already in existence and was opening 6 days a week. The Jewish owner was aware of the low economic prosperity of the area and deliberately kept his prices low according to his system of ethics. In conversation he said that the situation was unfair because the church did not have to pay rent or business tax, and had voluntary helpers whereas he would have to pay for workers. Meanwhile, several other excellent public buildings existed in the parish. These included a village hall that had undergone a multi-million pound transformation to turn it into a modern community building at the millennium, two well maintained community rooms provided by the football club, and a million pound community building constructed by the infant school. Figure 5 overleaf illustrates how the church at Somerside duplicated all these facilities. The reason for the duplication seemed to be that in their outlook, the leadership saw the Dahlia House Centre as the church's main point of contact with the community. Described in the *Annual Report* as "a centre for transformation and discipleship" it was looked upon as a stepping stone between

¹⁶ While some studies (e.g. Farnell 2001: 267) mention the assets that faith groups bring to the community, the sustainability of their services in comparison to secular community agencies is less often mentioned.

the community and God's kingdom. But this overlooked the possibility of reaching people by concentrating on pockets of unanswered needs in a disadvantaged community.

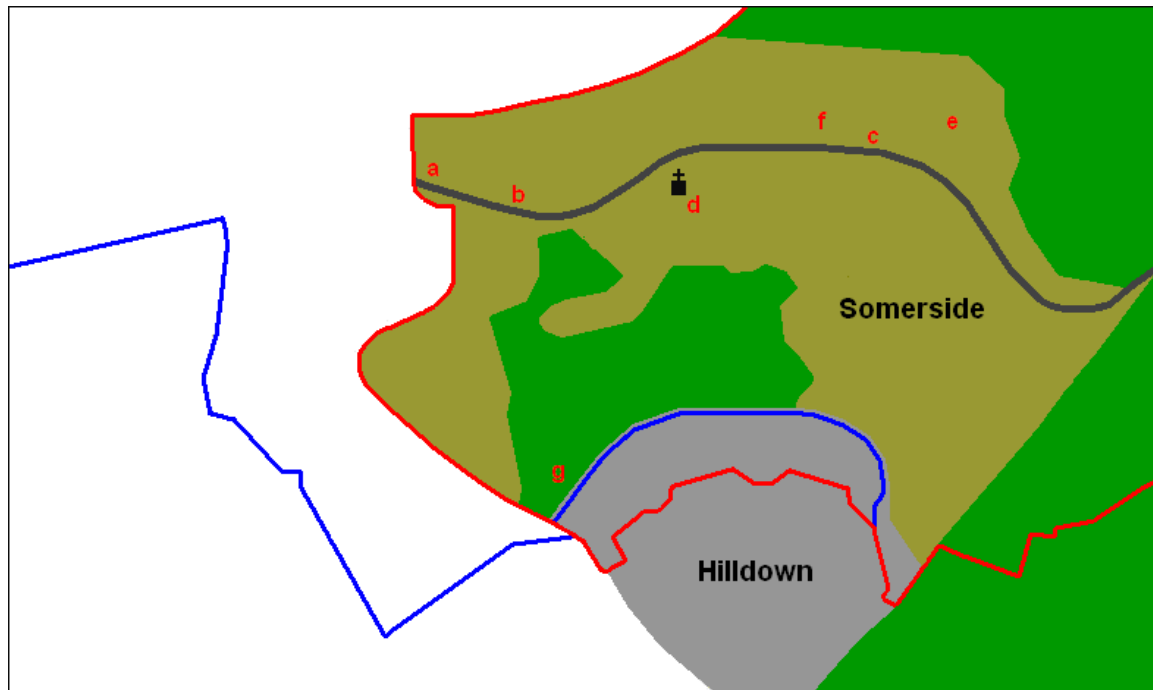
At times I gained the impression that the leadership worked with its own version of what Somerside is, and ought to be. The clergy and other members of the PCC rarely attended community events or activities other than those provided by the church itself. Instead, it was more usual to find lay members at a local football match or a community fun day. At one point the church's community website asserted that the answer to the problem of litter at Somerside was for "the whole community to have its attitude transformed". When an application to demolish the video shop and takeaway was made, the male Outreach Worker commented on a Councillor's blog that these shops were ugly and should indeed be pulled down. However, the facilities were valued by local people and a protest petition of 2,000 names was collected in just two days. The video shop enabled families to watch a film together, who might not be able to afford to see a film at the cinema. The leadership's outlook seemed to give little heed to Somerside as the community saw it or wanted it to be.

Figure 5. How the Somerside church's community venue and café duplicated other nearby facilities



1 The church's Dahlia House Community Centre and Café **2** Somerside Village Hall – rebuilt as a modern community building **3** High Street café that opens six days per week **4** Large community rooms provided by the football club **5** Community building constructed by the infant school **6** The Hilldown Community Centre

Figure 6. Evidence that the church leadership focussed on one half of Somerside in 2008



a b c Parts of Somerside that appear in the leaders' graphic representations of their visions
d e f g Parts of Somerside where the church held its Hope 08 activities. Only the litter pick (g) took place in the southern half **h i j** The church's contributions to Healthy Lifestyles Week were all held at the Dahlia House Centre

Conclusion

The situation at Somerside was not black and white, or all good or all bad. It would be possible to write a very positive summary of how the church provided for its community, similar to the examples found in the Church of England's report *Moral, But No Compass* (Davis et al 2008). There was much evidence of a genuine desire to do some good in the area, and the church attracted new members who brought resources to extend the scope and sustainability of its work. The skills of the leaders ensured that in many ways the quality of the work was high. Services such as the Dahlia House Café and the Toddler Group were a help to local people, and the church was efficient at forging links with other organisations and contributing to multi-agency schemes such as Healthy Lifestyles Week. News of the work going on Somerside reached other congregations and was talked of as an inspirational example of the church in action.

A deeper analysis finds that the church had a certain set of weaknesses. The leadership had parallels with those development professionals who do not support community participation but instead use tokens to overstate the level of empowerment. In the church,

one such token was the Annual General meeting which contradictorily stressed the importance of lay members “having their say” but was only held once a year. So too were sermons that mentioned the value of everyone’s contribution and their “gifts”, only to be followed by the usual pattern in which leaders centred decision-making around themselves. Professionals who do not seek the input of local people risk undermining the relevance of their projects. Likewise, the church weakened the impact of its work by duplicating facilities that already existed in the area, and by concentrating services in one part of the parish despite local issues of territoriality and mobility. Decisions suffered from a lack of local knowledge on topics such as affordability that the lay members could supply. These problems seem traceable to a top-down outlook resulting from a small leadership not sufficiently sourcing its outlooks from the community at the grassroots level.

The church overlooked the fact that resident-led projects could help to raise the self-esteem of a community, as the community development work on the Hilldown Estate had done. Like the church, the Rejuvenate Trust recognised the giftedness of the people; but then it proved the point by treating them as project developers rather than voluntary labour. The community were supported to produce their own initiatives, utilising the local knowledge, skills and social capital that they already had. Projects to emerge were relevant to the community and did not duplicate existing work. This presented a challenge to the Somerside church in that its system did not invest in the faith community in the same way. Instead, it had a clear definition of who should and should not be discussing the needs of the parish. Perhaps the church leaders could have adopted some of the approach of the Rejuvenate Trust. They could have arranged informal meetings among lay members and encouraged those with similar interests to develop projects collectively. They could have encouraged individuals to think that their ideas had value and could be turned into actions to help the community. New initiatives could arise through a model that unleashed the potential of the laity and brought added benefits such as confidence and capacity building.

On the Hilldown Estate, the Rejuvenate Trust employed a single worker on the ground to facilitate the regeneration scheme. This person was on a learning curve himself, finding out what projects could be funded by whom, and according to which criteria. It occurred to me that the church, with multiple paid staff including full-time Outreach Directors, might perform a similar action for the community at Somerside. Could clergy and volunteers make door-to-door visits, bringing residents with similar interests together and supporting them to set up their own projects? The community development work at Hilldown proved very popular with locals, cohering with the findings of my door-to-door question which indicated

that the self-help aspect of the Time Bank made it a more appealing agency than the church. Facilitating community self-help might help the church to regain its former significance in the community. In fact the tendency for churches to try to make inroads into the community by opening up cafés, should be weighed against the reality that most people work during the day and cannot use them. Another point is that by offering to help people throughout the neighbourhood to develop their own ideas, the church might remedy its tendency to focus on centring its activity in its own buildings in an area where local territoriality would deter some people from ever going to them.

Some features of non-participation that Harris discovered in her case studies, corresponded with the situation at the Somerside church. Harris recounts comments relating to the general disempowerment of lay people, a lack of participation of working class members in decision-making, and difficulty in encouraging younger people to take on leadership positions (2005: 54, 98-9, 109-10). Imbalances in empowerment across the same social groups were discernable at the Somerside church, albeit with some exceptions. The contrast provided by the work of Rejuvenate was that working class residents and young people were very much involved with shaping the future of their estate. The amount and the quality of resident-led change at Hilldown prompted the council to pay for the same work to be repeated in other areas, while the youth theatre, gardening team and goalpost project were all initiated by young people. Since the regeneration organisation used an intense focus on the value of local people's ideas and collectivism as its formula for success, it would be very interesting to see if this approach could pay dividends among disempowered groups in the church.

At the Somerside church, Charismatic leadership (in the Weberian sense) worked against participatory principles, as the very nature of charismatic authority draws attention to the qualities of the leader. It was therefore hard for charismatic leadership to avoid underrating the abilities of the ordinary people. Meanwhile, the Charismatic theology may have encouraged leaders to embrace visionary understandings of the community, obscuring the importance of listening to the community's own understanding of needs and supporting residents to use their God given abilities to tackle problems. The reliance upon spiritual revelations does not always bring to light practical problems such as overpricing in the café. It may also encourage a sense that God always works through a particular building as a point of contact, which is not conducive to reaching out into the community. Emphasis on empowerment from the Holy Spirit may cause leaders to ignore the need for other kinds of empowerment such as confidence and capacity building. On the other hand, the strong

motivational forces that Charismatic theology generates, might be valuable in inspiring churches to perform this kind of community work. An important question is whether charismatic leaders can use their special abilities to build up grassroots people so that they can develop their own community self-help. The community development model would be useful for showing how this could be done, and how it could be beneficial to adopt a more participatory and empowering approach over many aspects of church activity.

5. Case study of the Salvation Army Corps at Redwall

In this chapter I report on my case study of a Salvation Army Corps situated in a disadvantaged suburb of another city. As in the first case study, I outline the demography of the area and examine the authority structures and motivational factors that determine the activity of this church. I find that there are many local examples of resident-led activity and community participation, demonstrating the advantages of supporting local people to help themselves. The Redwall Corps is very good at providing for basic needs but it could perhaps also take some lessons from local community development projects.

Demography of the area

The electoral ward of Redwall belongs to a different city to the one where I conducted my first case study. The initial homes were built in the 1930s and formed the beginnings of an extensive council estate that would eventually consist of around 5,500 houses. During my study the community was characterised by a high degree of homogeneity. Census data collected in 2001 revealed that 96% of residents were white, and less than 1% claimed affiliation to a religion other than Christianity (ONS 2001). In 2004 a project called Communicating on the Redwall Estate (CORE) was commissioned by the local authority to find out how residents felt about their area and neighbourhood regeneration. Findings were extrapolated from interviews with nearly 160 families in addition to focus groups with small numbers of residents. The researchers discovered that 85% of their sample felt that the local community was *their* community because of the people. Residents said that they knew the people, they liked the people and they fitted in well personally. About two thirds of residents also said that they liked the area because they had family and friends living nearby. This was in contrast to a neighbouring ward whose residents said that they appreciated the diversity of cultures within their area. The researchers found that people living in Redwall had similar likes and dislikes. They write that when residents answered their interview questions, “Factors such as age, gender or housing tenure made no significant difference to the way people felt about the area.” The researchers also found evidence that this community experienced stigmatisation, with the bad reputation given to the area by outsiders and newspapers identified as the sixth biggest concern by local people.

A 2004 ward profile by the city council used information from multiple sources to piece together a statistical picture of Redwall. Much of the data indicated that the area suffered from deprivation and social stress. A section on how Redwall fared according to the 2004

Index of Multiple Deprivation revealed that 6 out of 8 of its super output areas¹⁷ fell within the most deprived 10% of super output areas nationally. All of its super output areas came within the worst 10% with regard to crime, education, skills and training. The level of unemployment was found to be high. Data from the Office for National Statistics put the total number of jobs at only 2,600 compared with a ward average in the city of 6,597. Figures taken from a city report on the needs of children suggest that deprivation is extensive among children living in Redwall. In 2004 the number of dependent children in households with no employment calculated as 1,441 compared with a ward average in the city of 292. And the number of dependent children in a single parent family stood at 1,400 compared with a ward average of 653. Various data gathered from the Quality of Life Survey gave negative indications regarding life on the estate. For example, 53% of residents felt that their neighbourhood had gotten worse compared with 43% for other wards in the city.

The nature and extent of the problems at Redwall had given rise to a wide range of local community agencies and resources. Common types of community service were those available to families and children, including youth projects, social clubs for the family, and projects especially designed to help parents and children interact with each other. Other services and resources included educational training and advice centres, health facilities and various groups interested in keeping the environment clean. Redwall had been the subject of a succession of Single Regeneration Budget and Neighbourhood Renewal schemes, and several neighbourhood development initiatives were still underway. One of the most significant of these was the Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership, which brought together resident-led groups, community agencies, and council departments to form a broad organisation to campaign for improved services. Local churches had banded together to form the Redwall Churches Council – a coalition of churches that tried to find ways to help the community. There was also a drop-in centre with different agencies present on different days to provide advice or counselling.

The CORE report mentions that more than a third of its sample of residents said they take part in community activities, while a fifth were involved in volunteering. However, this still leaves two thirds who did not get involved in any sort of community activity. The amount of involvement was much less than had been found for two other wards that the research team had investigated. The researchers' explanation for this was that Redwall residents generally held fewer educational qualifications than residents of the other two wards – a suggestion based on a government report, which found that people with qualifications exhibit higher

¹⁷ Super Output Areas are small geographic zones designed to capture variations within a ward.

levels of trust and are more likely to take part in civic activities (Pennant 2003). When asked what should be the aims of neighbourhood regeneration, about a third of residents talked about helping local people to “make more of themselves”. There was also frequent emphasis on the need to develop the neighbourhood for the sake of younger generations. More than a fifth of the sample said that they would like to become involved in regeneration themes already identified by other residents, such as tackling anti-social behaviour and helping children and adults to develop their abilities. The research team inquired as to what obstacles impeded involvement in community activities and volunteering. Time limitation was mentioned by about half of the residents, while lack of motivation or a view that there were no pressing needs was expressed by about a fifth. Just over a fifth of residents mentioned childcare issues as another obstacle. Twenty-five individuals stated that they would like to get involved in neighbourhood regeneration, which the researchers saw as a promising sign that participation in regeneration could be accomplished.

In my fieldwork some local behaviour and attitudes caught my attention. Street parties would sometimes be held to foster a sense of community spirit, and a street on the estate would be closed off for that purpose. Occasionally a resident who had not known about the road closure would insist on driving down the road despite the crowds of people and tables being there. During a heat wave, young men walked around bare-chested, adopting a macho swagger and showing off their tattoos. In some instances the negative reputation of Redwall seemed to have been embraced and turned into a positive thing. This was apparent in the case of a gang of youths who called themselves “The Redwall Bad Boyz” thus utilising the tough image of the estate as capital. A youth worker told me of the female teenagers in their youth group who behaved promiscuously with males of their own age. It was found that the females had formulated their own values system which held in high esteem those who were best able to service the sexual requirements of the males. Workers were in the process of helping the girls see that they could gain self-esteem through different routes. Subculture theories like those put forward by Brake (1980) and others might be adapted to account for audacious or out-of-the-ordinary behaviour among the community. Here the argument would be that low status and the stigmatisation of the community leads individuals to formulate an alternative values system by which to raise their positive profile in their own eyes. At Redwall this system often seemed to be built around working class masculine and feminine gender identities.

Pride appeared to be another ingredient in the community. Some residents wore locally made sweatshirts that emphasised stereotypical aspects of their culture by displaying well

known local colloquialisms or word plays on local place names. It was as though the wearer claimed proud allegiance to their culture that got treated as an object of fun by outsiders. Statements from residents in the CORE report appeared to exude undertones of pride along with their practical considerations. As one resident commented, “Redwall is my home. My parents, children and grandchildren are here. Neighbours look out for each other.” In the community magazine local people had expressed pride in their community. One mother described a football match between her boy’s football team and a rival team:

The atmosphere was fantastic and when the players ran down to the pitch with their kits on all looking the same, they looked so smart it brought tears to your eyes and lumps to your throats, they made us feel so proud to be in this community.

The emblem of the St George’s flag could be seen on display at a number of households on the estate, presumably reflecting pride in the English football team. So what may be case is that some local residents resisted the effects of stigmatisation by exercising pride in their community and their nation.

Figure 7. Some houses on the Redwall Estate display the St George’s flag¹⁸



Therefore it could be argued that although Redwall suffered from stigmatisation in a similar way to the area of my first case study, the community found different ways of dealing with it. Unlike Somerside where there was evidence of stigma subduing residents and

¹⁸ This photograph is of a house located somewhere else in the country.

causing them to disidentify with their own community, at Redwall there was more evidence of resistance to stigma. The development of alternative values systems and ways that a bad image could be turned around and perceived as a positive attribute, were used by some. Other residents generated a sense of pride as a way to avoid being undermined. However, the CORE report mentions how Redwall residents could lose confidence once they travelled outside of the ward:

Out into city-centre offices confident young women melted into silence, shy of their accent, the food, the dangers on the bus stop. Many do not feel confident or comfortable outside of their own environment. If they travel they do not do so alone.

This loss of confidence may be due to the fact that some of the mechanisms by which residents resisted stigmatisation were attached to the Redwall Estate. For example, if a sense of pride built around social networks is used to mitigate the effects of stigma, then that mechanism will become less effective the further an individual travels away from those networks. Or if a resident embraces a certain stereotype of the local culture as a positive attribute, then that mechanism offers less support among outsiders who are less likely to think that it is.

As with the first case study, there were many positive features of the area. One interesting characteristic was the number of resident-led groups and projects that existed in Redwall. Some local residents had become prominent community activists and resident-led social clubs seemed well supported by the community, with the Osprey House Community Association attracting more than 700 members. The CORE report revealed healthy sentiments among residents, such as the desire to invest in neighbourhood regeneration for the benefit of future generations. Some of Redwall's local facilities were substantial, including a library, a media centre for young people and a sports complex housed in the grounds of a former school. A bi-monthly community magazine delivered to every household contained positive reports on events and the achievements of local people. From time to time residents contributed views, letters or articles to the magazine. Letting residents speak for themselves reinforced the sense that their opinions and perspectives were worth hearing, and communicated ideas in language that other residents could understand.

The Salvation Army Corps at Redwall

Some initial points about the Salvation Army Corps

The Salvation Army Corps at Redwall originated as a Good Will Centre that was established with the construction of the Redwall Estate. Good Will Centres functioned as outposts from which the Salvation Army could minister to the needs of communities and have been funded by income from the sale of books written by the Salvation Army founder, William Booth. Later, the addition of regular worship raised the centre to the status of a Salvation Army Corps. The centre retained a strong focus on providing for the needs of the community and most people who went there were those who used its services, such as the elderly or parents requiring a toddler group. Sunday worship was low on numbers and the majority of worshippers were elderly people. The occasional child came in off the street and was provided with an activity such as drawing while the worship was underway.

The building basically consisted of a hall and a small kitchen area, from which a weekly programme of community services were run. Regular services included Tuesday Lunch which anybody could attend, with a small nearly new sale held at the same time. This was followed by a devotional service known as Women's League¹⁹ which anyone could join. A Toddler Group was held on a Wednesday morning, and on Thursday nights, two children's groups and a small youth group followed each other in succession. A football team was made up of several boys from one of the children's clubs combined with boys from another Salvation Army church. The team was managed by one of the staff and entered into a football league. Due to the small size of the Redwall Corps, a Timbrel Brigade stood in place of a brass band. The Timbrel Brigade sang while playing tambourines (with ribbons attached) to synchronised movements. It had been used as an additional club for young people but had seen a recent sharp drop off in numbers. The focus on providing a programme of welfare services meant that people using the Redwall Corps were fragmented into different groups attracted to different types of provision. The elderly people who attended the Tuesday Lunch and Women's League were distinct from the parents and children who belonged to the Toddler Group. The children who used the children's clubs constituted additional categories of people. These different groups of service users usually had no contact with each other.

¹⁹ Women's League meetings take place in the week. They were founded by William Booth as an alternative to Sunday worship, as early Salvationist women complained that Sundays were the only day when they could be with their husbands.

Many features of the Salvation Army are specific to its own set of traditions. These include the use of uniforms and the Blood and Fire emblem, as well as peculiar terminology such as “Timbrel Brigade”. Some of the traditions stand out from those of other Christian groups. For example there is no baptism or communion, and the Mercy Seat or Penitent Form designed for individuals to receive prayer, is a prominent feature of the worship hall. There was some feeling at the Redwall Corps that adaptation to contemporary cultures is needed. The Captain commented that some Salvation Army churches persevered with dated practices that are no longer effective:

They think that bands marching down the street will attract new converts, when people have double-glazing installed to keep out the noise... They think to themselves, “If we pray a bit harder it’ll start to work.”

At the Redwall Corps, tradition met with modern innovations including the use of modern worship songs played using a small sound system. PowerPoint technology was used in a simple way, with a presentation consisting of bullet points beamed onto a blank wall.

Some interplay between stigma and pride was evident within the Redwall Corps, as it was in the wider community. When a former member of staff tried to set up household budgeting classes for parents of the Toddler Group, her idea caused the parents to leave. In retrospect it was thought that the parents had been afraid that their lack of ability in budgeting would be shown up. A small crisis occurred during one Tuesday Lunch, when the Captain criticised the way that the two cooks were talking. Several types of meal were needed because some people could not eat a particular type of food. This caused the ladies to discuss how “Joan’s got to have a meal with bacon but Frieda’s got to have one without.” The Captain grew angry and said that it was very rude to say that someone has “got to” have a certain type of meal. Later one of the women approached the Captain and asserted that they had only been using the local lingo, and that they would not be changing the way that they spoke. These women were proud of their area. During a sermon where we were told to think of something to give thanks for, using each letter of the alphabet, they cheered when I suggested Redwall for the letter ‘R’. Like people in the wider community, they seemed to be using proud sentiments to resist the downgrading of their culture.

Authority structures within the Redwall Corps

The regimental nature of the Salvation Army gives it an obvious hierarchical structure, modelled on the rank and file of the armed forces. An uncomplicated hierarchy was found at the Redwall Corps. The leading officer had the rank of Captain which is the equivalent of an ordained minister of religion in other Christian denominations. The Captain of the Redwall Corps was answerable to one of several Divisional Headquarters covering different parts of the country. Below her were two paid Family and Children's Workers who had jurisdiction over the church's welfare provision for parents and children, under supervision from the Captain. The Family and Children's Workers had the rank of Soldier. As their longer title implied, they managed services such as the Toddler Group and were also employed to develop new projects using whatever special skills they had to bring to the church. An example of such a project was seen in the football team that the male Family and Children's Worker initiated. There was also an unpaid Soldier who was given tasks such as transporting elderly people to the Tuesday Lunch. Some of the people who attended Sunday worship were known as Adherents and did not wear a uniform. Adherents are those who have taken Salvation Army vows to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and gambling, but have not undertaken the additional vows and responsibilities that would promote them to the status of Soldier. A couple of Adherents were paid to cook meals for the Tuesday Lunch although the menu was decided by the Captain. Thus, the Captain and the Family and Children's Workers were the primary decision-makers at the church. The unpaid Soldier and the Adherents had only minimal decision-making powers in connection with their roles.

In the Salvation Army there is a balance between official hierarchy and actual freedom of decision-making given to staff at each level. Theoretically the hierarchy could be extremely controlling. For example, the General who is head of the British Salvation Army has a right to make decisions affecting the entire organisation on his own. Similarly, the Divisional Commander at the Divisional Headquarters has the final say on whether funding applications from the Redwall Corps are approved. The Captain of the Redwall Corps described her own authority in no uncertain terms:

We are what's called an autocratic organisation. We don't run by committee. So if I say we're going to do something here, we do it. If I say, "Our Sunday meetings are going to change from 11 o'clock to 10 o'clock," we do it. I would take advice from people but I don't have to use that advice.

The Captain of the Redwall Corps had a lot of freedom to make changes, since staff at the Divisional Headquarters acknowledged that she was better placed than them to ascertain the circumstances of the surrounding neighbourhood. As the Captain commented, “We’re the ones who know the needs of this area. Somebody sitting in the Division Headquarters only knows what we tell him.” In the same way, she gave much credibility to the Family and Children’s Workers, allowing them to choose activities for the children’s clubs and supporting them to create new projects. Thus there was freedom of movement for the paid ranks within the Salvation Army, despite a general absence of democratic process.

I found little evidence of empowerment of anyone below the paid staff, and I never observed an instance when an unpaid person was asked for input or advice on any topic. Notably the church lacked a Corps Council which is a feature of other Salvation Army churches. A Corps Council is comprised of members of the congregation selected by the Salvation Army leaders. They meet and input their thoughts and the views of other members in a discussion process on how things are moving forward. Explanations for the absence of a Corps Council at Redwall included the fact that this church started out as a Good Will Centre, so the structure was absent from the beginning. It was not the case that empowerment was completely inaccessible however. One of the worshippers brought food that she had baked to sell in the church and gave the money to a charity. The Redwall Corps provided a setting where she could achieve that goal. The Captain indicated her willingness that the hall be used by other organisers, such as agencies looking to hold computer skills courses. She said that she would be open to supporting any people to establish community projects in the building. It was difficult to uncover any feeling about participation from the laity. On the few occasions when I asked whether there should be more participation of lay people in decision-making, it seemed as though this was a new concept among them. When I asked the parents at the Toddler Group whether they would have local knowledge to contribute to neighbourhood regeneration, this seemed an alien thought to them. Similarly in the case of the Toddler Group parents, it was not an experience of community that they seemed to know.

Motivating factors within the Redwall Corps

At the Redwall Corps, the philosophy of care was to see a need and then go out to answer that need. This straightforward principle was the basis for deciding where efforts would be directed. The Captain told me that whatever the need was, that was where they would be looking to provide an answer. The principle was well illustrated by the Salvation Army drugs

advisor from another church who made himself available at the local drop-in centre, knowing that there was an acute drugs problem in the area. It was a way of thinking traceable to William Booth, who was personally driven by the sight of suffering to go out and initiate change (Hattersley, 2000: 6-8, 351). In his book *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, Booth (1890) touched upon some of his own biography writing that, “The misery of the poor Stockingers of my native town... kindled in my heart yearnings to help the poor which have continued until this day and which have had a powerful influence on my whole life”. William Booth’s view that if you see a need, you should do something to address that need, was made clear by a poster at the Redwall Corps illustrating the history and outlook of the Salvation Army.

In an interview with the Captain I wanted to ascertain whether the Salvation Army was still working according to Booth’s principle. The answer was that the value system remains the same and has at its core an instruction to demonstrate compassion for others that is attributed to Jesus Christ. The Captain said that, “We reach out to people’s physical needs because Jesus said to us, ‘Whatever you do for these you do for me.’” From a proselytising point of view, it was sometimes necessary to ease an individual’s suffering so that they can receive your message. “It is impossible to preach to someone who is hungry.” The evidence was strong that the Captain and the two Family and Children’s workers were motivated by a genuine desire to serve God and people in need. Their salaries were lower than those of some ‘unskilled’ occupations. The female Family and Children’s Worker has qualifications that would enable her to teach in a primary school but said that she would rather be doing her present work helping the children and teaching them lessons from the Bible (which she could not do in most schools). This, she said, was her ideal job. The male Family and Children’s Worker also served at a Christian homeless shelter in his spare time.

Figure 8. A Victorian Salvation Army homeless hostel. A poster at the Redwall Corps illustrated the history of the Salvation Army's provision of welfare



The evolution of the Salvation Army is interpreted differently by different sources. Some literature maintains that William Booth intended the Salvation Army to look and behave differently to other Christian institutions. According to Coutts (1977: 68) the association of church with middle-class privilege and snobbish indifference towards the poor, was a key motive for the adoption of military style paraphernalia. The visual differences were introduced to encourage a mental disassociation of the Salvation Army from the established church. But there may also have been a strategy in place to use the Salvation Army's eccentric behaviours to stir up controversy and commotion in order to raise its public profile. Hattersley (2000: 183-84, 276-96) writes of an example when the early Salvationists caused offence in an area of London, by purchasing the lease on a public house and then taking possession of it in the manner of a conquering force. "A thousand Salvationists led by a brass band... marched down the street at six o'clock in the morning" with the result that the premises came under immediate attack from local hooligans. People took exception to Salvation Army bands and banners, and when Salvationist rallies were disturbed by yobs, some of the blame often lay with their hard-talking, sensationalist posters. The reaction of the Salvation Army to persecution was to intensify the activities that led to the persecution. Hattersley believes that Booth's ambition was to lead an exclusive missionary sect that was very much engaged with the world but was not of the world. A German newspaper complained that, "The way that the Salvation Army people try to convert others is really against all manners and customs" (Watson 1977: 102).

The Captain of the Redwall Corps did not have such a conflict-based understanding of Salvation Army origins. Instead she described the formation of the Salvation Army as having arisen as a matter of course:

It just sort of evolved, I think. He was out in the streets telling people about Jesus and he would hire places in rainy weather... And they were called Salvation Meetings. And he wanted people to go to the churches but they didn't go. So then he had to establish churches himself, and we still have the Salvation Meeting in the evening (apart from here). The band would go around in the afternoon and people would follow the band back to the Corps.

Well he didn't really want to create a denomination at all; he wanted people to go to the established churches. But poor people weren't accepted in the other churches. They didn't smell as nice or they weren't as smartly dressed... William Booth wanted a church where everyone was accepted, where people who wanted to follow Jesus could come.

The Captain's milder version of Salvationist history and her picking out of themes connected with accepting and caring for the poor, again points to service attitudes being a key driver of the work at Redwall.

As with the church at Somerside, there was a decline in theological depth as one switched from the perspectives of the leaders to some of the laity. One respondent remembered how she and her sister had received a certificate after taking the Adherent's vows many years ago, but then went on to recall that, "Mine got torn up". She proceeded to recount an occasion when she and her husband had been to the pub, after which, she realised that she had flouted her religious vows. Her husband had said that the certificate was "not worth the paper it was written on" so she tore it into bits. That lady seemed indifferent to the memory of what had happened, but asked as a point of interest if she was still an Adherent. Another elderly lady sat at the front of the church on Sunday morning and voiced her own controversial commentary on the sermon. When the Captain lifted up an inspirational book and wondered if anyone else had read it, she replied, "That's small print isn't it? Oh no, I couldn't read that." Some Salvation Army traditions were not strongly held either. The Mercy Seat that is a

prominent feature of all Salvation Army churches was not used at Redwall for adults to receive prayer, because the people had plainly stated that they do not want to use it.

A different situation might have been found at the substantial Salvation Army centre a few miles away, which was big enough to be called a Salvation Army Citadel. It had around 160 members and a high proportion were Soldiers who had taken on the additional commitments to the Salvation Army. There may be a form of 'de-traditionalisation' that follows from larger churches and smaller satellite churches attracting different types of worshippers. If dedicated Salvationists are attracted to the Citadel, then the congregation of the satellite church might consist mainly of those with a more casual approach to Salvation Army traditions. The satellite church might then diverge as the leadership finds it necessary to adapt to the outlooks and culture of its people.

In conversations with the lay members I found that some of them had discovered the Redwall Corps by a process of 'shopping around' with different churches and hearing recommendations from friends. This would reflect something of Etzioni's utilitarian structure in which members conform to expectations to gain a share of the resources that an organisation holds. According to this structure, compliance is calculative and does not involve a great deal of effort from those involved (Torry 2005: 30). Here would seem to be an explanation for the lack of experience or strong feeling on the topic of lay participation. That is, people attending a church to get, rather than to give something.

Empowerment in the social services wing of the Salvation Army

One Sunday morning a Major from the Divisional Headquarters visited the Redwall Corps for worship and I took the chance to talk to him about the Salvation Army stance towards participation and empowerment. He disclosed that on these points the social services side of the Salvation Army was further ahead than the church itself. Salvation Army institutions such as homeless hostels have mechanisms in place so that users can be involved in the running of the service. I was advised to visit the Salvation Army hostel in the city centre. This comprises nearly 100 beds mainly for homeless people, with the other portion used as a drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation unit. The intention was to support clients to be able to move back into society over a few weeks or months.

The hostel's Chaplain told me of ways that the participation of the homeless in decision-making was actively encouraged. Bedrooms were segregated into clusters and each cluster had a worker assigned to it. Fortnightly Cluster Meetings were held with residents to discuss situations in regard to the cluster. There were also residents' forums within the hostel, where

individuals could meet with the management and discuss their concerns. Therefore participation was twofold, consisting of involvement with the cluster and with the hostel as a whole. The Chaplain saw the service users' input as important to the quality of help given:

Basically we're here for the clients that we actually serve; we're here for the people that live here. We need their involvement in how we develop a service. We need to answer their concerns, their problems if they've got any, as they affect the entire hostel. And so their involvement is vitally important in the progression of the service that we actually provide.

Feedback was helpful in getting the catering right. Clients told staff how they felt about the menus provided and what needed modifying. Staff then took that input to the caterers and discussed it with them to fulfil the dietary needs of the residents. Another area where feedback was needed was security and how residents' privacy could be protected.

A project team worked with residents of the hostel to empower them to do things on their own. Facilities were available in which they could be involved in decorating the hostel, although the colour scheme was dictated by the Salvation Army Housing Association. There was also an allotment where they could be very much involved in deciding what was grown. The staff aimed to empower the residents by whatever means they could, under supervision and once risk assessments had been dealt with. The homeless were even involved with interviewing prospective employees and volunteers. Residents sat on interview panels and were invited to put questions to the candidate. The Chaplain said that a policy of empowerment had been in force since the early days of the Salvation Army. The Hadleigh Farming Colony in Essex had been established to empower people and get them back into society, to give them meaningful employment and equip them in building up their skills. Although the homeless hostel was nowadays controlled by government legislation that emphasised empowerment, the management regarded it as something that they had already been doing.

Unlike the Major from Divisional Headquarters, the Chaplain insisted that empowerment structures within the Salvation Army's social services wing could not be compared with its churches. He said that the hostel setting built around full-time service users could not be compared to churches dealing with part-time volunteers. Having residents on-site meant that the homeless centre was necessarily highly structured, whereas the church had to be flexible

in dealing with people who had work and family commitments. Therefore it was impossible to compare the two.

Examples of community development at Redwall

On the Redwall Estate there have been numerous cases of resident involvement in the planning and implementation of new initiatives. Managers of neighbourhood regeneration and community services were able to provide many examples of community participation, as well as “strong residents” that had “learned the system inside out” so as to be able to gain local authority support for their ideas. Welfare projects in the area such as community centres, family projects and environmental initiatives had significant levels of input from local people. These examples challenge the views of critics such as Cooke and Kothari (2002) who question the viability of participation as a developmental model.

The Redwall Alcohol and Drugs Service

A resident-led initiative to emerge at Redwall has been the alcohol and drugs service. This service originated as an initiative by local mothers whose sons had become heroin addicts. At the time, the nearest place to get support had been the City Drugs Project which was miles away in the city centre. In the early 1990s the mothers held a public meeting to discuss the drugs problem as well as growing lawlessness in the community. The meeting resulted in parents of drug addicted young people setting up a drugs project. A weekly support group formed for family members of drug users, with an overall aim to set up a drugs drop-in centre located in the heart of Redwall. The centre would offer advice and information, education and training, counselling, needle exchange and a telephone helpline. The project received support from numerous sources, including members of parliament, schools, sports clubs and even betting shops – an early *Annual Report* contains a long list of credits. The same report states that the service was run entirely by local people determined to tackle drug misuse in the community. A second support group was established when some of the founders realised that they needed help themselves. Local people campaigned to get support from the Primary Care Trust and surgeries in the area, and secured SRB funding to open the drop-in centre in 1994.

The fact of the project being resident-led had an effect on the community due to issues of confidentiality. The key women were well known, meaning that local addicts could end up talking to a resident who knew their sister, neighbour or aunt. Drug users grew concerned that their personal details might end up circulating around the estate. Therefore consultants

advised the mothers to form a background governing body which could be used to bring in professionals. The women sat on the interview boards which employed the first professional workers at the centre, before eventually leaving the project to become involved with other regeneration work. One of the women became involved with the development of the Redwall Health Association, while another became a leader of the Osprey House Community Association and managed the youth club there. A brass plaque at the Redwall Alcohol and Drugs Service commemorates the fact that the project was set up by local mothers.

The Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership

The Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership is a management board comprised of eight residents who sit alongside representatives from the police, council departments and health and education authorities etc. The eight residents cover different zones of the neighbourhood and are elected by the community. This arrangement ensures that the majority of board members are residents, meaning that the focus is kept on community interests. There is not a large budget from which to draw and the main function of the partnership is to influence the way that local services are delivered. Any resident can stand for election and other residents vote for them using contact details provided in the community magazine. Volunteers have also made door-to-door calls asking households whom they would like to see elected to the board. The meetings of the Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership are open for people to turn up and communicate their concerns, and are divided into themes such as education, quality of life and the local environment, in order to cover different dimensions of needs on the estate. Some of the streets also have a resident who serves as a Street Representative, passing information and concerns on to the management board. When I met and spoke with two of the residents who had been elected to the Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership, the first spoke of the satisfaction that she gained from being able to help her community, while the other mentioned the sense of purpose that it had given her now that her husband was deceased.

The Osprey House Community Association

The Osprey House Community Association started around 1980 in a building that housed the Osprey House Youth Club. Social meetings were held on Saturdays and Sundays, with a committee made up of ex-members of the youth club and members of a football team who had passed their prime as footballers. With money saved and capital loaned from brewing companies, it was possible to spend £15,000 on renovating the building and launching a new

club. After 8 years the first paid staff were employed, although the role of the management and other workers for the club remained voluntary. Once the brewing companies gained confidence that the club was a viable enterprise, they agreed to lend a further £65,000 for the construction of a new building.

When the club management heard that the council was considering closing down the adjacent youth club, they put forward plans to amalgamate the site into one large community centre. Funds were secured from the Neighbour Renewal scheme, the youth service and a funding organisation that supported grassroots initiatives. A consultant was employed by the club to look at the feasibility of the plans and carry them forward, and an architect was taken on to design the community centre. As part of their application for Neighbourhood Renewal support, members underwent training in areas such as financial management, equalities training, supervision skills, communication skills, bookkeeping, reading reports and making 'what worked' evaluations.

With more than 700 club members, the leaders felt that they had good community support. Weekday activities included pool competitions, skittles and darts, followed by entertainment and discos at weekends. A pensioners' group met there in the week. The elderly people paid a fee towards tea and biscuits, and a program of activities including darts, bingo, quizzes, pub lunches and day trips. All of the work with the elderly was performed voluntarily. The community association ran the youth club and paid for the upkeep of equipment such as the re-covering of the pool tables. The club enjoyed getting the young people involved with the association and helping to develop it as a resource for future generations. On a short video about the Osprey House Community Association, a leader recalls that the worrying thought of not having a youth club had been a key motive spurring the residents on. A volunteer from outside the area told me that local residents were better able to deal with misbehaviour as the youth club than other youth workers. They had a way of talking that the young people respected, and could often appeal to knowing a child's parent so as to be able to report back on their conduct.

Once again it was interesting to witness forms of welfare provision in Redwall that contrasted with that of the case study church. The emphasis on group participation in local projects differed from the Salvation Army system in which each individual held a level of decision-making power according to their rank. Participation on the Redwall Estate was seen by professionals and activists as part of the well-being of the community, while at the Salvation Army Corps, authority and position were considered important for the church.

serve human needs efficiently. Both perspectives were motivated by a concern for human welfare and yet they produced different results.

Effects of the organisational system of the Redwall Corps

Excellent understanding and provision for basic needs

The Salvation Army Corps at Redwall addressed a variety of needs in an area where there was much deprivation. The Redwall Corps answered needs that other churches and agencies did not address, as in the case of the mother with seven children who occasionally came in after Sunday worship to get a food parcel. Some of the elderly people at the Tuesday Lunch said that other churches had lost interest in them, focussing instead on drawing the younger generations to church. Their view echoes that of the Church Army and Leveson Centre (2008: 16) who say that all the emphasis on getting young people to attend church can lead to the neglect of the elderly. For some elderly people the Redwall Corps was the only place where they would go for social interaction. Apart from the elderly, a few other people who attended the lunches might be classed as vulnerable adults. A man with learning difficulties made three bus journeys across the city to be able to go there. He had found out about the Tuesday Lunch by overhearing people talking on the bus. A woman started going to the lunches after moving to Redwall from Scotland. She did not want to talk about the circumstances behind the move. Some of the people were disabled and a couple required a wheelchair. When one of them became unwell, her daughter said that she was unable to visit her because it was the school summer holiday(!) So workers from the Redwall Corp visited her and provided for her needs.

Local children who became familiar with the Redwall Corps through its children's clubs, sometimes walked into the building during Sunday worship. When this happened the Captain put out an activity for them to do such as filling in a picture in a colouring book. On one occasion when a girl came in, staff asked her if she had been given any breakfast. When the answer was "no" they gave her some toast while the worship was in motion. Parents at the Toddler Group told me that the Salvation Army's format for preschool play was the best that they have encountered in the area. The structured timetable of "meal time", "play time", "snack time" and "singing time" helped the children to engage in the activities by letting them know what happened next. The parents also said that the timetable prepared the children for the nursery and infant school setting which was also very structured. All of the

Redwall Corps' services, not forgetting the children's clubs and the youth club, offered an environment where people could be cared for and supported.

Weaknesses in provision for 'higher' needs?

The research team that compiled the CORE report make reference to Maslow's (1943) theory that there is a hierarchy of needs in which someone will try to satisfy their most pressing needs first. An individual will begin by attempting to satisfy basic needs such as hunger and thirst, then safety needs such as protection, and social needs such as sense of belonging and love. After that, there are 'higher needs' including self-esteem and self-development. Although Maslow's hierarchy has been criticised for lacking empirical evidence (Wahba and Bridgewell 1976), it does make intuitive sense and it seems to correspond to the situation at Redwall. The research team expressed the concern that residents may find it difficult to satisfy higher needs, such as the self-esteem that comes by realising one's own potential. This was evidenced by low levels of education and skills, as well as high rates of unemployment in the area. Their concern was shared by residents themselves, who said that local people should be supported to "make more of themselves" with the help of agencies and other partners. How far the Salvation Army provided for these kinds of needs is unclear.

In some ways the Redwall Corps did provide a framework for individuals to gain some feeling of personal fulfilment. One of the women employed to cook meals for the Tuesday Lunch told me that the task gave her a sense of purpose in the week. Craft activities at the children's clubs, and being in the football team, could help children improve certain skills. Then there was the example of Abbie who attended the children's clubs at the Redwall Corps and later went on to become a volunteer. She then took the vows to become a Salvation Army Soldier and now worked voluntarily for children's clubs run by the Salvation Army and the Sea Scouts. When I talked with her, I gained the impression that volunteering for the Salvation Army with its moral status, welfare activities and code of discipline had imparted feelings of positive self-image and self-actualisation. But the effects of living in a stigmatised community were still evident. When I made the error of talking about the local dialect, Abbie buried her face in her hands with embarrassment.

It would be wrong to ignore the hope expressed by residents that local people would be supported by agencies to develop their own potential. This might have been a deeply felt yearning on the part of the community. Perhaps the Redwall Corps was good at administering basic care but had less of a concept of assisting people to fulfil needs

associated with personal development and purpose. Since many of the service users were elderly, a comment published by the Church Army and Leveson Centre may be helpful:

Churches sometimes mistakenly provide activities and groups for older people without consulting the older people themselves, or encouraging them to make decisions and run the activities. The more people are involved and can own what they are participating in, the more they will feel they belong, and the more they will gain a sense of purpose (2008: 33-5).

The report says that feelings of uselessness are common among the elderly but participation in decision-making and managing some of the activities at church are a means to remedy that situation. Harris (2005: 60, 68) finds in her case studies that church members value not only the care and support that their church gives them, but also the chance that church offers for self-development and personal expression. With these points in mind, a community development approach that brings people together to forge their ideas into community projects would offer just such opportunities.

Similarly, the parents who attended the Toddler Group might have possessed ideas, skills and motivation that could be drawn together into a new project. I saw evidence of their capacity, as having forged new friendships among themselves, they would organise nights out (normally to bingo halls) and invite the female Family and Children's Worker along. They seemed to have developed a sense of ownership of the Toddler Group and would take the initiative in cleaning and tidying the hall after use. The Captain attended a multi-agency meeting to hear from local agencies what needs there were in the community and what the Redwall Corps could do to help. But could she not have brought all the regulars of the church together to see if there was something that they would like to do for the community? There is good reason to think that the lay members would have valuable experiences of life on the estate from which to draw. Wuthnow (2006: 201) found from a survey of 2,077 people in the Lehigh Valley, USA, that many people seeking assistance from support organisations belonged to the same religious denominations as the organisations. This suggests that a church situated in a deprived area may have members with experience of deprivations common to that locality.

The Salvation Army as an efficient provider of welfare

The principle of ‘see a need, then go and answer that need’ meant that the Salvation Army leaders could be good observers of phenomena. For example, it was noticed at the Toddler Group that the parents were impressed by the relatively simple meals such as lasagne that got served towards the beginning of the session. Through listening to their comments, the female Family and Children’s Worker perceived a need for a cookery course so that parents could cook these meals for themselves. The meals which the Redwall Corps provided contained wholesome ingredients, as it was observed from the refuse which residents put out for collection that a lot of junk food is consumed locally. By the same principle, it can be easy for people to get the attention of the Salvation Army by presenting them with a particular need. When a group of drunken teenagers approached the Redwall Corps as staff were leaving, and complained that, “No-one wants us, not even you,” the Captain replied that they should come back when they were not intoxicated and then a discussion could take place over how the Salvation Army could interact with them.

The Captain recognised that due to the complexity of the community and the scale of the problems, the process of seeing needs comes not just from personal observations but from liaising and discussing with other organisations. So she attended a local multi-agency meeting that was held every few months to see what was already being done, whether targeted needs were being addressed, and if there were any new needs. At one of the meetings it was noted that weekends on the estate could be very long – especially for people who live alone – as there is not much going on. So occasionally the Redwall Corps organised a Sunday afternoon tea.

With the Salvation Army’s focus on meeting needs, comes another principle of keeping things simple so as not to hinder rapidity of response. Even the theology has the appearance of having been streamlined for efficiency. A Salvation Army Website lists their eleven doctrines and summarises the Salvationist mission to “preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination” (Salvation Army 2008a). The sacraments of baptism and communion are not practised, partly because they have been a source of division among Christians (Salvation Army 2008b). The founders also expressed some suspicion towards intellectualised religion. William Booth said, “We abjure all learning for its own sake. Moreover we believe that a great deal of it is calculated rather to unfit rather than aid its recipients for actual warfare” (Hattersley 2000: 245). At the Redwall Corps the principle of keeping community provision straightforward was evident. The Captain told me that she preferred to keep bureaucracy to a minimum in order to meet needs

as quickly as possible. If a family needed a food parcel, she wanted them to receive it at once, rather than a week later after forms had been filled in. The non-democratic system at Redwall was therefore seen as an advantage by the Captain;

Interviewer: What are the strengths of having that system?

Captain: Speed to do things when you need to do them. A few months ago, when Miriam started, she was talking to the mums and realised that they didn't know much about cooking. So she said, "Let's start a cooking group." Within two weeks we'd started.

Disempowering aspects of the Salvation Army

Important though it is, the principle of 'see a need, then go and answer that need' risks confining understandings of needs and solutions to just the perspectives of the workers. When I asked the male Family and Children's Worker if he could see the Salvation Army ever embracing urban arts (e.g. hip hop dancing, breakdancing, DJ-ing) as a way to help the children he replied, "No, the Salvation Army will only use activities that have a spiritual value." But a youth work agency had recently trained a team of teenage dancers to such a high standard that they were able to win the World Hip Hop Dance Championship. This accomplishment was then relayed to the whole community via the community magazine. Urban arts also featured in a talent show held when a fun day was organised on the estate.

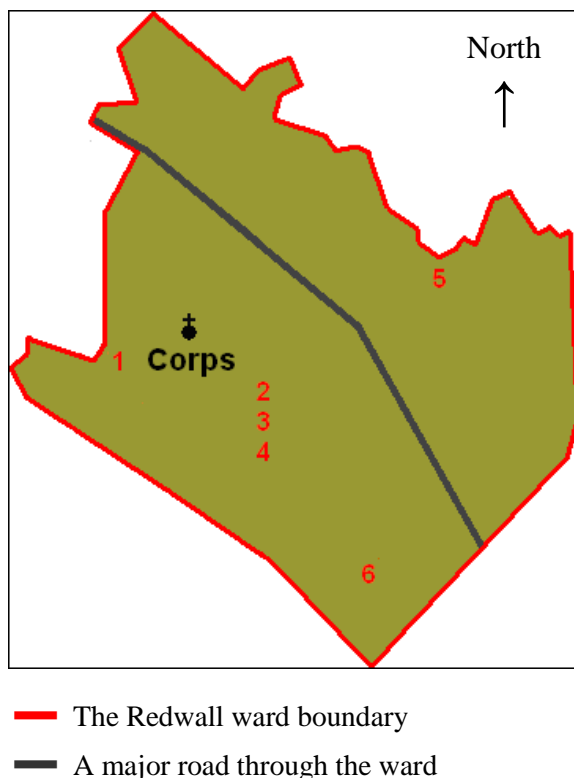
Another 'blind spot' may have been a slowness to draw lessons from the surrounding examples of community participation and the benefits that these bring. At Redwall there was evidence all around that assisting people in the community to use their own abilities to address local needs could bring significant improvements. Some of the projects, such as the Redwall Drugs and Alcohol Project, were being constructed by residents even before the arrival of funded neighbourhood regeneration schemes. Community participation seemed very important at Redwall because of the way that local people used pride to resist stigmatisation. This was an example of how, if a community has developed a mechanism for dealing with the effects of stigma, institutions such as the Salvation Army might support the residents to use that mechanism to greater effect. Community participation offered a way that people could develop skills and personal self-esteem – a criterion listed in the CORE report. However, none of this ever seemed to prompt a rethink at the Redwall Corps, where staff

continued with a traditional understanding of care that inherently portrays people in need as welfare recipients.

When church traditions cause workers to rely too much upon their own perspectives, they may not give much time to empathetically seeing through the eyes of others. The Captain could not understand why teenagers wanted to spray graffiti on the walls of the church building. To her mind, they must be so bored that they could think of nothing better to do. When I suggested that the teenagers could be hitting back at society and the adult world which denigrates their youth culture and their local community, she challenged where that impression could have come from. “They never go outside of Redwall, so they must get it from themselves.” But residents in the CORE report blame the media for the bad press that their neighbourhood receives. Seeing a community in need is not the same as understanding needs through the eyes of the people who live there.

Other aspects of the Salvation Army may run contrary to participatory principles. One factor is the practice of working with a hierarchy modelled on the armed forces. Each rank is allotted a degree of decision-making power which declines the further one goes down the hierarchy, to the point where the lay people at the bottom of the hierarchy have no decision-making power. When a new member of staff such as a Family and Children’s Worker is appointed, there is a formal expectation that they will bring new skills to the church and soon establish projects around those skills. An over-emphasis on what skills the staff are able to contribute, could easily divert attention from what local people have to offer.

Figure 9. Proximity of the Redwall Corps to initiatives offering prime examples of resident-led projects and community participation



1 The Osprey House Community Association **2** The Redwall Safety Group – operated by residents who install security equipment such as smoke alarms **3** The Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership Office **4** Redwall Drugs and Alcohol Service **5** Redwall Health Association – a partnership which includes the local community and promotes well-being **6** The Hayes Community Centre – run by a committee of residents and offering services such as children’s clubs, day trips and a café

Conclusion

At Redwall I felt that I saw a church that had set into a certain pattern of operation partly because of its origins as a Good Will Centre. Originally established for the purpose of reaching out to a new estate through the provision of welfare services, the Redwall Corps had a background of prescribing care rather than giving consideration to community self-help. The pattern became recursive as many of the people attracted to the church were those with needs, thus perpetuating the orientation towards the provision of services. The prescriptive style of engagement seemed also to be driven by Salvation Army traditions. Historically the Salvation Army worked with the poor and destitute, meaning that much of their traditions were about responding to the most pressing needs rather than providing for higher needs identified by Maslow. The end result was a system that was very well adapted

to meeting basic needs on a disadvantaged estate, but which restricted provision for other needs such as personal fulfilment. A tradition that expects leaders to be on the lookout for basic needs might cause them to miss other things. Close to the Redwall Corps were multiple examples of projects that abundantly illustrated the ability of local people to identify and tackle their own problems, generate pride in the area and develop personal skills and positive self-image (Figure 9). But I found no evidence of these transformations exerting any influence over the activity of the Redwall Salvation Army Corps.

How far the Corps could integrate a participatory approach into its constitution is a difficult question. Its small scale might confine its work to the people who attend, and some of the elderly might be too much in need themselves to participate. It would be undesirable to make alterations to the way that the church operates if the changes would impede its existing provision of care. It could even be argued that highfaluting ideals of community participation fail to recognise the very real importance of just providing for immediate needs in a deprived area. It is also possible to envisage a kind of functional specialisation where other agencies supply the empowerment for people who want it, while the Salvation Army just specialises in providing basic help for the hungry, lonely and uncared for etc. The autocratic organisation of the Redwall Corps and the utilitarian motivation of the lay members made for a church where there was little immediate interest in the meaning of participation. This would obviously cast doubt over the merits of introducing a new emphasis on people empowerment. On the other hand, the example of the Salvation Army homeless hostel shows that the Salvation Army can provide a very utilitarian service and still incorporate participatory principles. Users of the hostel come expecting basic help and not participatory roles, but they still respond to these opportunities when they are given. The hostel offers evidence that the Salvation Army can provide empowering structures while retaining its rather formal chain of command.

There are reasons why the leaders of the Redwall Corps might consider a community development approach. The experience of the failed budgeting class showed how consciousness of personal weaknesses can frighten individuals away from accepting adult training and might cause them to break contact with the service provider. But the community development model, which gently encourages participants to meet and discuss possible project ideas, could lead into a growing confidence out of which a benevolent capacity building project might emerge. The way that the Redwall Corps was organised around prescribed services fragmented its base of service users, since groups with different needs were attracted to different types of provision. A participatory project could bring these

people together. A meeting could be held to see if they wanted to contribute an activity to the local Fun Day. The collectivity of this approach might then lead to the forging of new social networks. The irony of the Redwall Corps was that its theology of answering welfare needs had, with a few exceptions, attracted people with utilitarian motives. A community development approach might encourage these individuals to help others by developing their own ideas as to what they could provide. The small size of the congregation reflected the problem of a church with very distinctive characteristics trying to make inroads into a community that values its homogeneity. But those barriers of difference might be broken down if outreach was performed by local people who already go to the Redwall Corps but share similarities with the surrounding community.

This case study showed how a church's organisational system of this church, including its authority type, compliance structure, history, traditions and theology, can cause it to overlook the benefits of participation – even when the evidence is close at hand in the community. An empowerment approach was even present in the Salvation Army homeless hostel but still did not carry over into the church. If there was a hidden generative mechanism at work here, it was the long history of giving out welfare that induced prescriptive view of welfare in the minds of the leaders. Although the church was officially 'open' to supporting grassroots initiatives, its traditions took it in a different direction. At the Redwall Corps, the tradition of providing welfare services was inspired by Christ's commission to go and care for the needy. But if the only rule of thumb is the principle of seeing a need and then going and answering that need, there might emerge a prescriptive philosophy of care that does not understand the importance of self-help. In contrast, some of Christ's actions depicted in the New Testament are demonstrations of empowerment. In the Gospel of John, Christ says to a paralysed man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man is cured, picks up his mat and walks (John 5:1-8). A team of volunteers is not brought in to care for the man, but he is empowered to address his own needs. With a little adaptation to be ready to support some forms of self-help, the Redwall Corps could become complete in its provision for needs and its response to Christ's example in the scriptures.

6. Case study of the Diversham Intentional Community

This chapter reports on my case study of a Christian intentional community located in a deprived inner city area of Britain. As with my first two case studies, I outline the demography of the area and then examine the authority structures and motivational factors that determine the activity of the intentional community. This last case study reverses the trend of the first two, in that a secular regeneration scheme fails to take community participation seriously, while the Christian group produces some positive outcomes from its participatory approach.

Demography of the area

Diversham is a heavily populated electoral ward that is situated near the centre of a large city in northern England. I was surprised to find that the council had published little in the way of useful demographic data on the local community, despite the extent of deprivation in this ward. This was also my shortest case study so it was hard to build up a detailed profile of the area. Historically the city had generated revenue from its mining and manufacturing industries, and these have affected the development of the Diversham area. As a flourishing industrial city of the 19th century, funds were available to build quality roads, parks, public buildings and some reasonable housing stock. This meant that the area had inherited an infrastructure that could be built upon. But a less desirable effect of the industrial past was also evident. One side of the city was where most of the heavy industry had been carried out; the other side being the place where the affluent city dwellers lived away from the noxious fumes of the factories and furnaces. In recent times a similar trend had continued, with the characteristics of the two halves of the city serving to influence the modern planning process. Land in the traditionally poor area had been earmarked for further social housing to be added to its council estates, while exclusive apartments were more likely to be constructed alongside other such dwellings elsewhere in the city. These different concentrations of housing tenures led to deprivation in wards such as Diversham.

I discovered a 2009 university report that traced the course of poverty in the city in the last decades of the 20th century. The report estimates that by the early 1970s Diversham was one of only 2% of neighbourhoods in the city where more than half the population were experiencing relative poverty.²⁰ The 1970s and 1980s saw increasing polarisation of the city population, as both wealth and poverty levels rose and the number of households located in

²⁰ The report employs a measure of poverty devised by Dorling et al (2007) which deduces from household survey and census data which households are excluded from certain norms of society.

poor areas increased. A similar pattern occurred in the 1990s when there was a 4% increase in people living in areas with very high deprivation scores – as measured by the 2001 Index of Multiple Deprivation. Feeding into the above trends were the decline of major industries and firms throughout the 1980s, and the closure of coal mines in the 1990s leading to job losses on a large scale. The same era saw cuts in expenditure on social services and reduced subsidisation of public transport as the 1984 Rates Act capped the tax-raising powers of the city council. Formerly this expenditure had gone some way to addressing poverty and inequalities in the city. In the 1980s and 1990s, regeneration schemes based on neoliberal economics sought to improve the prosperity of the city by diversifying its economy. This led to investment in shopping areas, entertainment, cultural attractions and education.

The university report highlighted the city's social divide, with statistics revealing disparities in life expectancies, health, quality of life and educational opportunities between the wards. Its figures showed that residents of Diversham lived on average 7 to 12 years less than residents of another nearby ward. Diversham also had the lowest rate of pupils getting the secondary school of their choice, and the ward was one of a cluster of neighbourhoods where there were higher than average levels of unemployment among young people. Although the report appreciated that there has been investment in health, education and regeneration in the city, it expressed concerns that patterns of expenditure attempted to make an even distribution across wards instead of allocating resources according to needs. This directed funds away from areas where there were concentrations of deprivation. In 2001 the Index of Multiple Deprivation ranked Diversham within the top 1% of deprived wards nationally. For this reason it qualified for the government's New Deal for Communities programme aimed at regenerating communities. A total of £52 million was allocated for investment in the ward over the space of 10 years, with a focus on children and young people, community strength and well-being, physical environment and safety, and employment and skills.

Diversham was home to almost 20,000 people, many of whom were migrants. The ward was a designated area where asylum seekers were habilitated in Britain, with the result that there were now around 40 resident ethnic groups with more than 100 languages spoken. The diversity of cultures was evident in local shops and restaurants which sold produce from around the world, as well as in the range of religious centres of worship. The migrant population introduced an additional dimension of needs, with cultural and communication barriers making it harder for families to connect with public services. Some of the ethnic minority pupils needed extra support to keep up at school.

Race relations were better than in some other areas of Britain that have multi-cultural populations. One worker in the community commented that the extreme diversity at Diversham helped race relations, as it means that there could be no sense that Diversham consisted of one particular group pitted against another. However, this type of cultural fragmentation might also have negative consequences. Putnam (2000) maintains that the efficiency of a community derives from reciprocal relationships between its members. Although there seemed to be good reciprocity within ethnic enclaves, mutual support between cultural sectors of the community might be harder to achieve. The proliferation of religious centres of worship in the area may be due partly to religion being used to bolster ethnic identities and construct boundaries demarcating one group from another. Hunt's (2002: 164) study of African Pentecostal churches in Britain found religion being used to provide an environment relevant to the background of African migrants, where they could find a place of cultural belonging and refuge from hostile reactions of the outside world. In the case of Diversham, other institutions might also be used to provide cultural refuge. Places where I found local white residents congregating were the few pubs, which seemed like islands where members retreated from the multi-cultural setting and preserved the white working-class culture to which they belonged. On the whole this seemed like a community with obvious cultural divisions but without widespread hostility.

The intentional community at Diversham

Some initial points about the intentional community

The Diversham Intentional Community was founded in the 1960s at a time when the counter-cultural revolution was making its challenge to the established order. While ideological movements such as the feminist movement were reacting to societal structures that produce situations of marginalisation, some people felt alienated by churches that appeared to operate in the manner of corporations, with an overdependence on rules and regulations as well as activity that seemed removed from the Gospel portraits of Christ. The intentional community was founded for those who sought to return to the narrative of Christ's ministry as depicted in the scriptures, in order to apply his personal example to their lives. It would also give members a voice and help them to initiate their own social action projects with the support of the collective. The vision of the founders was that this community should be revolutionary in taking action to address contemporary needs,

experimenting with radical new ideas and ways of being a Christian, and encouraging congregations to attempt transformations within the traditional church.

The originators of the Diversham Intentional Community felt summoned by the Gospels to create a Christian community that would practice key aspects of the teaching of Christ. Therefore it was necessary to find a way to bring individuals with similar convictions into contact with one another. The intentional community started out in a rented shop, with advertised workshops endeavouring to discover how the example of Christ might be applied in modern times. These workshops and other meetings enabled ideas to arise out of the discussions, thereby giving birth to new projects that could combine people's skills and enthusiasm and provide a framework for sharing. One such project was the Communal House, where a property was purchased to provide accommodation for several local activists to live together. Another was a grocery store designed to promote justice by boycotting goods that were produced through exploitation or in countries that violated human rights. Much later the grocery store would be followed by the launch of a café that sold ethically produced food in another part of the city. Rooms above the shop and the café were used to house asylum seekers and take care of their needs, as a clear example of Christ's teaching on social care applied to contemporary situations. Over the decades, projects and meetings organised by the intentional community attracted newcomers, although other key figures moved on as the lifestyle of an activist living in a shared house is not usually permanent. The projects sometimes attracted volunteers with no faith, or a different faith to Christianity, but a Christian ethos was maintained at the shop and the café by holding worship meetings in these buildings.

In recent years there had been some new developments. The grocery store had attracted the interest of university students who shared similar perspectives on global justice. The students who volunteered at the store had converted a downstairs room into a simple relaxation area where anyone in the wider community was welcome to go. In the same room the students hosted seminars on a broad range of contemporary issues. These seminars were attended mainly by other students and users of the café where they were advertised.

A multi-faith area had been constructed in the basement of the cafe, with the purpose of building relations between people of different faiths. This had been achieved mainly through seminars where representatives of local faith groups explained their fundamental beliefs. People of different faiths attended the cafe and also served in it, lending to an atmosphere where people from all backgrounds could feel that they belonged. The café was also used as the venue for a Multinational Meal once a month, in rotation with a denominational church

in the ward. The purpose of the meal was to welcome and support asylum seekers and other migrants to the area, and to help construct positive relations between different ethnic groups of people in the neighbourhood.

The intentional community had several types of worship meeting which could be considered its equivalent to worship in the traditional church. There was the fortnightly Ecclesia Meeting, where individuals took it in turn to lead the worship and bring a short Christian-based lesson. The meeting made use of a collection of liturgies developed by the intentional community and reflecting its belief in a dynamic Jesus who is proactive at the grassroots level. Different viewpoints were welcome and the group tried to respect, if not love other people and their perspectives. The Ecclesia Meeting was not legalistic or highly doctrinal but people who wanted to join did need to be interested in friendship. There was an emphasis on hospitality and creating a worship meeting where no-one was excluded. At the meeting people sat in a circle (in contradistinction to the church's rows of chairs or pews) to reinforce the principles of caring and sharing with one another. At one of the meetings a member brought a lesson on "letting go of ego". He made references to God's foolishness being superior to man's wisdom and God as a refuge in times of uncertainty.

At the Communal House there was a long-established tradition of holding a Eucharist for the activists who live there, and regular members of the Ecclesia Meeting also came and took part. Each individual ministered the bread and wine to the person sitting next to them. This differed from the conventional style where church leaders minister the Eucharist to their congregations and thereby recapitulate a sense of hierarchy and separateness. The Ecclesia Meeting and the Eucharist were followed by a simple ceremony in which everyone joined hands and repeated a blessing for one another as an expression of love and unity.

Figure 10. In the intentional community a worship meeting would end with a ritual not dissimilar to the action depicted



In the café was held the monthly Café Gathering, designed for people who wished to explore in an open and democratic way the relevance of Christian traditions to modern contexts. This took place on a Sunday morning when other people met for a traditional church service. The Café Gathering offered an alternative to sitting and listening to just one person speak, and was an attempt to reach people who would not normally think of walking into a church. Roughly 8 to 12 people usually came, including a few individuals who did not belong to any traditional church. Certain components such as liturgy were absent and the structure was permissive in that anyone was allowed to say what they wanted to express. Because this pattern inevitably led to contrasting views, care was taken to respect others and not to tell anyone what was 'right'. People used the conversations to discover what they thought and felt, and how they wanted to act in response to the Jesus of the Gospels.

The combination of worship meetings and project activities such as the seminars and the Multinational Meal, meant that there were multiple occasions in the week when members of the intentional community and its associates would share time, beliefs, thoughts and food. This community saw regular gatherings as a way for its members to genuinely share their lives with each other. Holding the meetings in a house, a converted basement or a café reinforced the idea that the theology was intended for life application. There was also a theme of risking oneself for the vision of the intentional community, since the sharing of lives makes one vulnerable to the words and actions of others. Involvement with the intentional community required a degree of commitment and individuals contributed time,

effort and finances to the running of the projects. Signed-up members added their name to a pledge guaranteeing that they would provide these kinds of support. The leadership tended to be critical of people who suggested an idea but then did not want to help implement it themselves. I was told that a typical response would be, “Well you’ve got an idea, what are you going to do about it?”

Different categories of people were associated with the intentional community. All individuals who attend the worship meetings were considered members, but there were also the signed-up members who made the additional pledge. Project volunteers consisted of members of the intentional community together with others who held no faith, or a different faith, but who still appreciated the work that was being done. This breakdown did not amount to a hierarchy, however, as the intentional community was neither legalistic nor formal in practice, so there was little differential treatment for people belonging to these different categories.

Authority structures of the intentional community

The activity of the intentional community was divided into worship meetings and social action projects, and both had their authority structures. Management of the different projects was exercised by the people who made up the relevant groups. For example there were groups which met to discuss the running of the grocery store, the café, care of the asylum seekers and the interfaith work. In principle anyone with an interest in one of these projects could participate in its group meeting, on condition that they made a practical contribution to that particular project. The meetings were open to input from everyone present, with an absence of strict regulation or protocol. But that was not to say that participants could always elicit immediate support for an idea, as the outlooks and values of the project leaders exerted a steering effect upon the direction of the work. Moreover, a decision-making process with a strong democratic note is likely to generate some conflict of opinions. One respondent summed up the balance between participation, leadership and differences of opinion:

Myself, I like the fact that it’s fluid and it’s not too strictly controlled. Obviously Peter and Susan, there’s certain things they really care about, and there’s certain things you’d probably have to keep on about to get them to change it. In groups you have some competing views. It can’t be totally free for all; it needs to be roughly guided a bit. I’ve not been here a long time, so I’ve not got the frustration of some

people who wanted to make changes but maybe they haven't been able to get through as quickly as they would like.

Another participative feature was the Quarterly Meeting, which was held four times a year to bring together all of the activity of the intentional community. This meeting was chaired by the main founder of the community, and anyone who was connected to one of the project groups or worship meetings could attend. In theory the collective could recommend a decision that the founder and other leaders disagreed with. The one meeting that was not open to most members was the Management Meeting, where the running of the intentional community was discussed. This was a closed meeting because it covered sensitive issues such as the needs of certain vulnerable people. Individuals that had been active for some time as key workers might gain access to the Management Committee, but there was nothing to guarantee any individual such an opportunity.

With regard to the worship meetings, authority seemed to operate in a similar way. A combination of leadership guidance, established values and the sharing of ideas interacted to form a type of worship that can evolve but within certain parameters. Some established values were reiterated in the book of liturgies that was handed out. The founder of the intentional community was present at worship meetings and thus exerted unofficial control. Even so, there was significant freedom of participation in that members could bring a lesson that they wanted to share. One individual employed a more traditional format when it was her turn to lead the meeting. She brought liturgy and teaching representing a conventional expression of Christ, gained from her many years of living in a convent. At the Café Gathering there was a focus on getting everyone's input concerning the themes that they wanted to discuss. The people drove the agenda by stating the things which are important to them. The themes are then delegated out to people to lead. When I took part in a Café Gathering, the group had previously held a session where they moved around the café writing possible themes for discussion on post-its and fixing these to the walls. It emerged that a number of people wanted to discuss similar points, such as how they could relate to Christ in the modern age and how the kingdom of God turns worldly perspectives on their head. The focal points for the next few meetings were derived from those ideas. One of the leaders of the Café Gathering said that some Evangelical groups also offer a café model of church, yet they continue to overlook the problem of hierarchical control in the primary church where they were based. He saw this as a "blind spot" in their outlook.

There was a discernable hierarchy within the Diversham Intentional Community. At the top level would be the community founder and on the next level, those individuals (normally long-standing leaders) who comprised the Management Committee. At a lower level would be the individual leaders of various projects. But despite the presence of a leadership ladder, there did seem to be factors that enabled a greater degree of participation and ability to contribute to the decision-making process. One factor was the way that the community included participation among its foundational values. A vision for supporting people to translate their ideas into action so that they could follow the proactive example of Christ was a central tenet. Then there was the Quarterly Meeting which allowed conversation to be had over any aspect of the intentional community, with opportunity for anyone present to be heard. Similarly the project meetings and worship meetings were designed to facilitate input from everyone. The head of the grocery store gave an example of how the university student volunteers had been empowered to follow their own initiative:

We have a shop meeting once a month or so when we really go to town and people decide things. For instance, about six months ago we were having a shop meeting and one of the girls said, "I think we should make this room downstairs into a room where customers could come down and have tea or coffee, or pasties. It was full of junk, full of stuff that was stored. But I thought, "Give them the head" and they went down, they painted it, they emptied it, and they decided where to put everything. They got furniture off eBay. One of them got hold of a computer and now we provide free internet. They've done all that – it had absolutely nothing to do with me. And we have these seminars in it. There are topics that we decide between us, on a Thursday at lunchtime.

Motivating factors within the intentional community

The Diversham Intentional Community was founded upon principles drawn from the new radical theology of the 1960s, which followed from Bishop Robinson's publication *Honest to God* (1963). The founder had wanted to re-examine the Gospel evidence as to what Christianity was and is. He believed that Christianity is not all about spiritual experiences but that it has a lot to do with changing the secular world. He therefore found Robinson's book useful in looking at the relevance of God to a secularising society. The teaching and actions of Christ, such as healing miracles and discipleship, were devolved into elements that could be used to project Jesus into modern situations through lifestyle choices and social action.

Certain historical developments were also influential on the constitution of the intentional community, such as the work of John Wesley (1703-1791) in setting up Christian communities that stressed the importance of social action alongside faith. Another key influence was the Iona Community founded in 1938 for believers who wanted to act out their faith in a way based upon the common life.

A later influence would be liberation theology. The intentional community took an interest in its themes of showing solidarity with the poor, empowering grassroots people, working with women and setting up house groups. It was noted that these actions had been practiced by Christ as an active demonstration of the kingdom of God on earth. Of all the books in the New Testament, the Gospel of Mark depicts Christ's active service the most. So this source helped to shape of the activity of the intentional community by revealing how God's kingdom is manifested through the praxis of Christ. In my case study I heard several references to Mark's Gospel with regard to "doing" Christianity. Although the intentional community clearly believed in participation and empowerment, it was accepted that it operated within a theological framework that was not devised by its current members. Instead, the theological framework and its sophistication owed much to the academic training of the founder and other early leaders.

Some of the members and volunteers told me of their appreciation of the values underlying the activity of the intentional community. One individual commented on how important it was that everyone at the Ecclesia Meeting is given "voice". Only then could people really feel a part of it. Another person felt that the intentional community with its pattern of regular meetings, was close to the model of the early church which had comprised small closely-knit Christian communities. This individual followed the Rule of St Benedict and was interested in integrating the worship meetings into the daily worship prescribed by the Rule.²¹ Someone else said that they could not see why the local churches were unable to arrange the same regularity of meetings and level of social contact. Some members also attended denominational churches but felt that the intentional community had something additional to offer. The focus on the person of Christ was important to one respondent, who complained that church sermons ignored the crucial accounts of Jesus and what he had said and done. A volunteer at the café commented that he appreciated the ethical stance of the café in opposing global and local injustice. An example at the time was the petition in the café that people were signing in opposition to the closure of much needed adult learning

²¹ A set of instructions originally written by Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547AD) for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot. Later these rules were also adopted by nuns.

classes. The student volunteers at the grocery store were attracted to the original aims of the store, for example in supporting Fair Trade and ethically produced goods. Among the various people involved with the intentional community, a good sense of ownership was evident in the ways that individuals talked enthusiastically about the particular roles.

Regeneration schemes in the area

In 2001 the Diversham New Deal for Communities Partnership was awarded £52 million to invest in regenerating the area over a span of 10 years. The Partnership Board included ten elected community representatives, three voluntary sector representatives, two business representatives and a Diversham Councillor. Each year an annual report made claims as to the success of the New Deal in addressing the concerns of residents. There had been reductions in crime due to investment in police officers, extra street lighting and home security improvements for some residents. Some of the social housing terraces had been given a facelift. An old public building, Dartford House, had been revamped and turned into a set of function rooms and classrooms for adult learning. Another building had been converted into commercial office space. A project aimed at supporting ethnic groups at risk from underachieving at school, had enjoyed some success in raising GCSE results. And a range of grassroots projects that worked with target groups such as teenagers, the mentally ill and drug addicts had been financed. The report boasted of there being many routes by which the New Deal professionals were communicating with residents – for example through a community magazine, a newsletter, an information vehicle and public meetings.

Despite the triumphant tones of the annual reports, it was apparent that the regeneration scheme had in many ways gone wrong. A survey of 259 residents found that only a quarter of them felt they had any influence over the regeneration scheme. An edition of the community magazine bore a letter of resignation from a community representative over the decision to have no new elections. He argued that the community were not represented if they could not vote for their preferred candidate. A supporter of that letter wrote to add that development professionals had pushed out community activists and sidetracked activists into doing administrative tasks, while awarding themselves with high salaries and engaging in token consultations with the public before following their own agenda. I was told by an active citizen that the Partnership Board had been formed from community people, but that these people were not informed of the major developments in the regeneration scheme. They were not told when the New Deal management overspent, or where most of the money was going. A representative of the voluntary sector on the Partnership Board commented that he

had never succeeded in getting the voluntary sector to be accepted into New Deal perspectives.

Residents of a local council estate had sought funding to tackle problems and improve the quality of life on the estate. For this reason they had set up a tenant's association. Instead of supporting this initiative, the New Deal management paid the city council £1 million to demolish the estate within the year. The residents were then re-housed in different areas, dismantling established social networks and bringing the accusation that the New Deal management were trying to reduce poverty figures by shifting the poorest people elsewhere. Another million pounds was ploughed into adding a bus lane to the main road through the ward, although the road did not suffer from enough traffic congestion to warrant it. This caused one long-standing activist in the community to comment abruptly that the idea had been "complete rubbish".

In the case of Dartford House, many local people had wanted the building to be turned into a community arts centre. The New Deal management decided instead to convert it into public meeting rooms and classrooms. In the end, few functions were held there and these could have been held in other venues around the ward. Later it emerged that the upkeep of Dartford House would run into tens of thousands of pounds per year, long after New Deal money had run out. The other building which had been converted into office space was not entirely successful either. It was possible to rent out about 60 percent of the offices to businesses, but takers could not be found for the remaining 40 percent. It was also unclear whether firms would continue to use the offices once the initial concessionary rent was raised to ordinary levels.

Residents launched the Diversham Action Group to pressure the New Deal management into making changes that the community wanted. It was felt that professionals from outside the area were setting the agenda in collaboration with the council, and that local people were getting no say in the matter. An activist spoke of the reaction of the New Deal management to this pressure group:

We took this to New Deal and said, "We've got some broad support here, we're not happy with the way things are going, we want you to be accountable, we want to have meaningful input into the allocation of this money and we expect you to listen to us the community." And they didn't like it at all. It put the fear of God into them. So a lot of their efforts went into trying to placate the community instead of genuinely trying to involve the community.

Two years before the regeneration scheme was due to end, it emerged that the New Deal for Communities in Diversham had used up all its funds. This resulted in the almost immediate closure of vital grassroots projects that had been supported with New Deal money. The resentment that followed was further fuelled by details of the salaries and pensions paid to the professionals running the scheme. The executive manager alone had been paid £85,000 per annum.

The Diversham Community Action Group

The Diversham Community Action Group (DCAG) was started by residents who wanted to see change in the area. As the group got bigger it was decided that they needed a legal arm. Therefore the Diversham Community Action Trust was set up to handle legal aspects and the employment of workers, leaving the rest of the group free to be the political arm and to campaign without restrictions. About two years after the group began, Diversham qualified for the New Deal for Communities programme. Early into the scheme, DCAG set up offices for New Deal employees and actually employed their first staff. This partnership got off to a good start and some of the people who worked for the group went to work for the New Deal. The chair of DCAG became the chair of the New Deal Partnership Board.

Tensions and conflicts began to emerge shortly after. The New Deal management began to launch projects which duplicated many of the things that DCAG had already been doing, for example in its projects with children and young people. Amidst rumours that the group was perceived as a threat by New Deal professionals who wanted to be seen to be making their own impact, it became harder for the group to secure New Deal funding for its independent projects. One local resident described how New Deal professionals started to take over the community development work that the group had been doing:

The New Deal came in and first of all, they said that they wanted to collaborate with the successful work that was already going on. What they really wanted was get their hands on the database. They wanted the contacts, the details, and then of course once they'd got that, their teams took over. The New Deal came along and they could fund projects, so people were enticed to go where the money was. They joined these New Deal project teams, which isolated the original working groups.

By now those activists who had gone over to work for the New Deal had lost their power to speak out. To become a board member, one had to become a company director, which meant

being bound by company rules not to say anything that harmed the New Deal in any way. The remaining workers for DCAG found it hard to hold the New Deal management to account. Professionals in charge of the regeneration scheme moved to offices outside the area, with security doors that prevented public access. Since most local projects were now funded by the New Deal, there was the risk that funding would be pulled if there were any criticisms. According to a former worker for the community magazine, this threat was regularly made:

When the New Deal came along and funded *The Gazette*, I remember saying to them, “You’ve really got to be careful about this...” But the attitude was, “We’ve got no other source of funding so we’ve got to take it and we can’t bite the hand that feeds.” And I think *The Gazette* learned that lesson very hard. Whenever they did speak out, they were told in no uncertain terms, “We’ll pull the funding on you.”

It was discovered by New Deal staff that they had paid DCAG £80,000 over their allotted funds, due to an administrative error. Since this money had already been spent, accountants worked on ways in which it could be paid back. However, the New Deal management suddenly announced that DCAG had technically gone bust and closed the group down. This brought suspicion that rather than caring about the work that the group was doing, the New Deal professionals had taken their chance to remove a competitor. Another possible motive was that the New Deal management had itself overspent and thus shut down DCAG as a cost cutting move.

Damage done to the community

The Diversham New Deal for Communities resulted in a number of negative effects. With outside people coming in and organising the regeneration, the New Deal management was seen as another version of the local authority. Since they depended on employing people from outside the area, there was no investment in local people or support for existing organisations to take over once the scheme had finished. It was claimed that the Partnership Board had become a buffer to defend professional staff. Because Diversham had been receiving New Deal support, it was impossible to convince other funders to support projects that had been co-opted by the New Deal but then failed when the money ran out. In this respect the ward would have been better off if there had never been a New Deal programme,

as it would have been possible to sustain those projects that had been around before the scheme began. And yet, because the New Deal in Diversham had terminated two years early, its professionals were compensated with handsome redundancy packages.

A section of the community – the now demolished council estate – had been hacked out at the request of New Deal professionals, and a million pounds intended for investment in the community had gone to the council as their reward for the demolition. Distrust of the authorities and a belief that no-one cares for the will of the community were reinforced. DCAG was re-launched with part time volunteers, but on a smaller scale and with almost no capacity. Residents who had once played important roles in regeneration were devastated after getting involved with projects and having their hopes dashed. There were tales of former activists now having to take antidepressants, and one individual who could not bring himself to walk past the building where the projects had been based. One respondent said of development professionals, “They don’t come in because they’ve got a heart for the area. They come here because of these big salaries.”

The founder of the Diversham Intentional Community believed that the shortcomings of the New Deal for Communities were linked partly to a failure to provide a framework that encouraged ordinary people to identify needs in the community and take action. The waste of resources that resulted from the New Deal management deciding priorities over the heads of the community, illustrated the inadequacies of trying to address needs from the top down, while the Diversham Intentional Community represented on a small scale the kind of fostering of grassroots initiatives that was needed across neighbourhoods and cities.

Effects of the organisational system of the Diversham Intentional Community

Participation generating motivation and a sense of belonging

My study uncovered reasons why members and volunteers appreciated the inclusive and participatory nature of the intentional community. My first interview was with a young man who was involved with the interfaith seminars. He was interested in different faiths and the well-being of the wider community. At the interfaith seminars he had heard people talking about how the café operates, and this had resulted in him volunteering to serve there. His efforts had then branched off into other things. He had installed a computer in the café’s interfaith library, made a catalogue of all the library books and hosted interfaith seminars while the usual leader was away. He found that participation in decision-making processes

had actually increased his sense of ownership of projects, which was a powerful incentive for doing more:

Well the thing is, if you get chance to input into decisions, then you feel like you're part of the running of the place and you're more likely to invest your energy into doing things and supporting it.

This was someone who had been used to following other people's decisions in previous organisations. But having immersed himself in the work of intentional community, he was able to contribute some very valid points at the meetings:

At the shop meeting, people wanted to change the shop to make it a bit more profitable and stuff like that. But I said it's important that people can volunteer who aren't very skilled, because they wouldn't get that chance anywhere else. So once you try making money and you've got people who aren't very good, it can get in the way of that.

According to this respondent, the inclusivity of the intentional community was helpful for people who normally feel isolated and low in spirit. It was a place where they could be accepted and could join in with the discussions and activities:

There are certain people like Barry for instance, who feels a bit of an outsider in general. Because they feel isolated they keep themselves separate, do you know what I mean? I've seen Barry looking much happier, not just in this place but outside. He comes to some of the other meetings I go to. I see a positive reaction in him from getting involved.

Some literature agrees that this type of social contact is very valuable. Holman (1998: 186-192) writes of the support that residents of a disadvantaged estate received from there being time for talk and cups of tea in church. It enabled them to forge new friendships and helped to lift them out of social exclusion. At Diversham the inclusivity was evidenced on an occasion when during a worship meeting in the café, a young woman who was known by some of the members walked in from the street. She told them of how she had been pushed off a bus by the conductor, pointing to a graze on her head where she had fallen. The group's

philosophy of accepting all people allowed the woman to know that she could interrupt the meeting and be given some emotional support.

Some members also attended traditional churches but found that the collective nature of the intentional community had certain strengths that their church lacked. A lady spoke of a problem that she had encountered with bureaucracy at her church when a project had required that volunteers be CRB checked. The manager of the project had caused difficulties by insisting that each volunteer supply *five* types of identification whereas the CRB administration had said they did not need that much, and that they were satisfied with what had already been given in. That manager had seemed more engaged with bureaucratic procedure than with the moral objectives of the project. The same lady said of the intentional community that it was “good not to be following orders”.

Another individual told me that she appreciated the acceptance that had been extended to her by the intentional community. She lived on the other side of the city and had challenged them as to whether they would be interested in someone living so far away. One of the first meetings that she attended was held in someone’s home and she had been touched by the kindness that she had been shown. She added that the intentional community had brought her great joy by allowing her to participate. Her desire was to emulate the Biblical figure of Martha who had found it important to be making contributions. One of her ideas, to deliver a ton of soil to the Communal House and use it to plant flowers and vegetables, had been implemented, and this had helped her to feel accepted as a member of the group. A leader of the Café Gathering spoke of the benefits to be found in worship meetings where anyone can be heard. Worship that takes the form of an open discussion added authority to the views of the lay people and allowed leaders to find out more about the beliefs of the congregants.

Some difficulties with participation

From brief statements that people made, I became aware that the democratic structures of the intentional community could lead to internal tensions. The open nature of the Quarterly Meeting meant that disagreements were not uncommon. One lady said that she could sense, and was affected by, the tensions between people who felt that the community should be evolving in different directions. Problems could also arise if people joined the intentional community with an aim to co-opt the group into following a new plan. The founder specifically identified this as a problem, and a member mentioned two individuals who had joined with a plan for advancing the intentional community only to be frustrated by the founder. It seemed likely that these brief references related to the same past incident.

One long-term member had gained permission to use the café to campaign against the violation of Palestinian rights. The campaign included posters on the walls calling on people to boycott Israeli goods. Yet the argument that I overheard this individual using to explain the situation in Israel was somewhat one-sided. When talking around this subject with other members of the intentional community, I felt that they lacked the knowledge to make a balanced judgment on the situation in Israel. Members may have been persuaded to sanction this use of the café without being given an objective presentation of all the facts.

I also found some evidence that levels of participation could be restricted at the discretion of the founder. A conversation that I heard between a project leader and the founder appeared to concern a revised system for structuring a meeting. The leader apparently wanted the group to discuss possible methods for casting votes, but the founder advised that this and similar points be left out, on the basis that a certain individual would start to argue and the conversation would get bogged down. The founder acted as gatekeeper to the intentional community because people usually joined the group through contact with him or through referrals. In this way he could control what kinds of people were in the group so as to be able to participate. A member told me of her concern that the founder had always been central to the intentional community without sufficiently preparing members for the task of running it after he had gone. He was elderly and would not be around forever. However, it seemed that some initial discussions were underway around the task of ensuring that members would be equipped to continue the intentional community into the future.

A theology that draws non-believers into community development

An interesting aspect of the intentional community's theology was the way that it attracted non-believers to get involved. A tendency to draw inspiration from the radical actions and teachings of Christ, combined with a vision for emulating his example in contemporary situations, resulted in projects that even people of no faith could readily appreciate. This was most evident in the grocery store where the modern ethical issues that were highlighted struck a cord with students of a nearby university. The store had window displays which drew attention to issues such as women's rights, air miles and our carbon footprint. In this way it established a tradition which combined Christian ethics with moral issues of the day. Although no overtly Christian label was attached, certain Christian concepts such as ideas of community and personal responsibility translated into concerns that were understood by the secular world. The intentional community and the students both wanted to make the world a better place. Efforts at the shop had traditionally addressed global injustices, yet the work of

the students in creating a downstairs relaxation room, free internet and seminars that anyone could attend, was of benefit to the local community. Since the students were made to feel that their ideas were worth implementing, further enthusiasm and proactivity was generated. When I attended one of the seminars, I saw that a sense of collective identity and social concern had created a framework for the students to minister to one another. One student mentioned how a childhood operation on his brain had left him weak at maths and English, making him feel that he was not on a par with other people. He was, however, very artistic and he had painted the murals on the walls running down the stairs to the relaxation room. Another student reminded him of his talent, saying that such creativity had always been necessary for humankind to progress. These words quickly raised the other's morale.

The students were considering running the store as a co-operative, bearing in mind that the founder's wife who managed it needed to stop due to her age. Representatives of other co-operatives had been invited to speak and offer advice on the subject. It seemed that in this branch of the intentional community people empowerment was absolute, as the leader was preparing to hand over the management of the project to the volunteers. I enquired as to whether the students had thought about devoting more effort towards needs in the city, as opposed to concentrating mainly on global concerns. Why not organise a litter pick followed by a community picnic on a disadvantaged council estate somewhere? It was suggested that the students could be encouraged to reflect on local needs by holding a seminar based around the question, "What can we do to help our community?" In a manner of speaking, the Diversham Intentional Community was doing community work, encouraging and raising the capacity of people to bring positive changes to the area. Yet the participatory principles that it uses were not sourced from community development theory, but from a theological view that people should be supported to follow the radical example of Christ and to participate in the kingdom of God.

The alternative theology as a deterrent factor

In Diversham there is a Charismatic Church that meets in a refurbished warehouse and has a Sunday attendance of over 100 people. Perhaps this church presents the biggest challenge to the intentional community in that it attracts so many more members. Presumably the people who attended this church found rewards that are not so present in the intentional community. When I visited I saw that people at the Charismatic church derived an uplifting sense of connection with God through periods of atmospheric worship and prayer. There were also practical benefits, such as a live band and a children's session that takes place while the

parents are listening to the sermon. The pastor was aware of the intentional community and was critical of its theology of emphasising social action over spirituality. In his view, one should begin by developing a spiritual relationship with God, out of which comes the gifting and anointing to perform different roles such as faith-motivated community work. Other local churches also expressed reservations over the intentional community's alternative angle on Christianity. One of its members belonged to a local church and professed to be of believer of both the Christian and Muslim faiths. This had proved a bone of contention among the congregation of that church. Even within the intentional community, one person held back from becoming a signed up member because she felt that the centrality of the Trinity was being overlooked.

In fairness it was not the case that there was no sense of spirituality at the intentional community. A respondent told me that she felt the presence of Christ and the Father in the Café Gathering and Ecclesia Meetings. Some members saw spirituality as something that was located in the actions performed, as these were regarded as taking the kingdom of God into the community. The low numbers of people belonging to the intentional community could be partly explained by the fact that it was not greatly advertised but acquired new members via word of mouth. However, with their various meetings outside of church walls, their own liturgy and radical application of Christian traditions, it did sometimes seem as though the intentional community was taking refuge from mainline interpretations of Christianity. Some unorthodox traits and the perceived lack of spirituality might have caused other believers not to notice positive aspects of this community's active expression of Christianity and the lessons that were there to be learned from it.

Conclusion

The organisational system of the Diversham Intentional Community produced some interesting phenomena to observe. It was more effective at drawing non-believers and prompting them to serve in the community than it was at attracting Christian believers. Born at a time when many were seeking lifestyles that diverged from mainstream trends, the intentional community might have been too 'alternative' to gain much credibility in traditional church circles. Yet some churchgoers found in the intentional community additional rewards connected with participation and social action that supplemented what they were able to gain from their churches. It also appealed to individuals who held to some Christian tradition but who did not relate well to traditional church. And by translating Christian concepts into forms of social concern that were relevant to the modern age, the

intentional community was good at enlisting the help of people who believed similar values from their own non-Christian outlook. Thus a significant finding is that the intentional community began by acting upon a certain Christological view, and ended up supporting people of no faith to help the local community. Although it had fewer members than any church in the area, the amount and the quality of the work that it performed were considerable. The interfaith work helped to promote respect and build links across sectors of a culturally fragmented local population, and the work to house asylum seekers catered for one of the neediest and most vulnerable groups of people. In other ways the intentional community supported people by creating a social network to which they could belong and feel accepted. Here the participatory approach could be seen to have an additional benefit inasmuch as it helped people to feel included.

There were also some restrictions on participation. The leadership could resist ideas, make decisions at the Management Meeting which excluded most of members, and steer considerations away from some issues. As an unofficial gatekeeper to the group, the founder exercised some control over what kinds of people would belong to it – his choices representing a potential exclusionary mechanism buried within the ethos of participation. Reasons for the restrictions included the passion of the leadership for preserving the foundational principles of the community, the need to discuss sensitive issues in private and the threat of newcomers trying to co-opt the faith community into their own plans. People involved with the intentional community accepted the need for there to be a core leadership to hold the community together, but there may have been problems with the founder not sufficiently preparing members to manage this community once he was gone. Progress had been made in this direction with the grocery store but not yet with the intentional community itself. It is therefore tempting to think that a passion for preserving the original character of the community caused the founder to adopt a very central role, with the negative implication that the group had become too dependant on his influence and had not acquired all of the capacity that it needed to continue without him.

The case study of the Diversham Intention Community highlighted some positive benefits of the participatory approach, while the effects of disempowerment were all too apparent from the secular regeneration scheme. The intentional community recognised that ordinary people have ideas and skills to offer, and so it encouraged their participation in decision-making and activities. This had the effect of increasing a sense of ownership of projects, which encouraged contributions and raised the confidence and capacity of the volunteers. In contrast the professionals working for the New Deal had little regard for the ideas of the

community and did not utilise or invest in the abilities of local people. This left many ordinary people uninvolved and unready to be active citizens. Whereas the intentional community encouraged participation through a framework of ethical values that served as an incubator for new ideas and projects, the New Deal management seemed more interested in making an impression that would justify the status and salaries of its professionals. As a result, competing regeneration projects were disbanded and grandiose projects were implemented that turned out to be of little tangible benefit to the area. The intentional community used the participation of its members to boost feelings of caring and belonging, whereas the New Deal professionals essentially belittled the local population by withholding information, destroying a valuable resident-led organisation and riding roughshod over the wishes of the people.

An important question is whether traditional churches would be prepared to learn from the participatory practices of the intentional community, even if some features of its theology were not approved? This possibility may be more likely than it seems because of common ground between the intentional community and the traditional churches. My three case studies found that in each instance, beliefs surrounding the kingdom of God and the person of Jesus Christ informed the activity of the faith group. The main difference was that participation was understood by the intentional community as belonging to the principles of love and justice which characterised the kingdom. And since the Gospels portray Christ as a man of radical action, the intentional community felt it necessary to support people to imitate that example – which meant listening to their ideas and helping them to achieve their aims for the wider community. In this way the intentional community essentially practiced a community development approach and offered a plausible theological grounding for it. If these points could be communicated, then churches looking for new ways to be significant in the community might be able to take insights from the work of the intentional community. An obvious challenge is that since an intentional community attracts those who want to participate, it is questionable whether the same participatory practices could work with an ordinary congregation. But it should be remembered that some individuals had been attracted to the work of the intentional community before they realised that it provided support for them to develop their own initiatives. This was the case with the young man who had initially been interested in the interfaith work, and had later been inspired by the group meetings to be very much involved with future planning and implementation of various projects. It was also true of the students who came to volunteers at the ethically sourced grocery store, and then developed their own ideas for the store when given the opportunity.

There were even a few individuals who belonged to traditional churches but were still attracted to the communal activities and projects of the intentional community. I regard all these participants as evidence that traditional churches will have some lay members who would appreciate and respond to the introduction of more participatory structures, even if that level of participation has not been their original motive for attending the church.

7. Presenting the case

In this chapter I bring together evidences from my literature review and fieldwork to present a case that churches can produce the benefits claimed of participation, by adopting the participatory principles of community development. I show where there is evidence that each of these principles can bring positive outcomes, and where they also have theological support. I mention examples of Christian groups that have already demonstrated participatory principles as evidence that churches could make the relevant changes. And I offer suggestions on how each principle could be used by the church to produce new benefits in faith driven activity. Later in the chapter, I make some discussion of potential problems to do with churches adopting participatory styles of organisation and activity.

Participatory principles and the churches

1. Participation as social justice

Community development theory makes an appeal for social justice in the form of communities exercising their rights to be fully involved in regeneration strategies and having input in decisions over the future of their area. Modern notions of social justice are influenced by thinkers such as Locke (1632-1704) and Paine (1737-1809) who saw the right to self-determination as an inalienable aspect of human nature. But the social justice argument becomes more persuasive when coupled with evidence of positive outcomes that participation can bring. If it can be shown that participation enables communities to use their abilities to improve local services or tackle prevailing needs and problems in their neighbourhood, then authorities that withhold participation deny communities the benefits that they might otherwise have achieved. A second aspect to participation as a matter of social justice is that communities can be supported to take collective action to challenge injustices that impact upon their quality of life.

Since the principle of participation as social justice becomes more persuasive when accompanied by evidence of its potential benefits, the example of the Porto Alegre budget is useful. In this example residents across the city of Porto Alegre reformulated the municipal budget so that resources were directed towards the most serious situations of need. Many participants were poor and held little power, but the budget enabled them to use their knowledge to obtain a fairer distribution of resources (Gret and Sintomer 2005). Parallels in Britain are found in the Nottingham Council Community Project which enabled residents to

work with other sectors in developing a range of practical projects (Ashworth 2002). In both cases social justice was achieved by enabling residents to secure real benefits for their communities from the available resources. There are also evidences that community participation can be effective at tackling injustices. For example Brent (2009) recalls that community action on a Bristol estate served to lessen the damaging impact of the drugs trade in the area. In my case study at Somerside, I argued that the regeneration scheme on the Hilldown Estate promoted social justice in similar ways. Money that had been allocated for regeneration was invested in things that the community requested, such as a project to improve local literacy skills managed by the residents themselves. In comparison a previous regeneration scheme that had been dominated by agencies had failed to find its way into the community. The new scheme at Hilldown assisted residents to engage with a social landlord that had allowed the children's play area to decline. Some residents established a Facebook group and used it to post photos of broken or dangerous play equipment on the internet, and arrangements were made for residents to design a revamped version of the playing area to be implemented. The regeneration work at Hilldown boosted local confidence and civic activity, which caused more people to engage with council departments over various issues and demand things of them.

Calls for social justice are also found in the Christian scriptures. Liberation theologians point to the Old Testament Prophets such as Isaiah, who denounced a scene where people were vigorously engaged in religious ceremony while all around injustices were left unaddressed (Isaiah ch. 58). Christian theology reminds us that the kingdom of God encompasses the twin principles of love and justice. The kingdom is depicted as a realm of justice that reflects the character of the Deity and his desire that people be treated fairly. Therefore as Sheppard (1982) notes, one must wish for there to be social justice in the community in order to meaningfully pray, "Thy kingdom come". Social justice is embedded in the message that Christ announced at the start of his mission, when he stated that his purpose was to preach the good news to the poor and to liberate the oppressed (Luke 4:11-12). The Gospels indicate that not all of this liberation would be confined to interior spirituality – some of it would be practical. For example Christ was critical of the legalistic Judaic faith of the day and started a new faith movement which freed followers from the many burdensome regulations that the religious authorities had imposed upon the people (Luke 11:46). This liberation was reflected in his invitation to join the movement with the words, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30)". As Marchant (2004)

points out, churches are commissioned to continue Christ's work which includes preaching the good news and liberating people.

In schemes to help and improve neighbourhoods, social justice is served when residents themselves are given the opportunity to be involved in the discussions and to actively secure benefits for their communities from available resources. This causes one to wonder whether a more just system could be implemented in the churches. Since churches have their own resources including buildings, people power and finances, could church leaders not provide stronger support for lay members to create projects for their faith community or wider community? A case in point would be the social action group that Green (1987) set up with lay members of a congregation and which went on to establish an information and advice centre. These individuals were supported by their church to use their abilities to develop a valuable facility for the wider community, as opposed to remaining gifted people but with limited power to be effective at the base of a church hierarchy. On a smaller scale, my study of the Diversham Intentional Community confirmed that faith groups can empower individuals to bring transformations by enabling them to use their potential. Examples include the contribution of the student volunteers who were supported to create a relaxation room for the whole community to use. From these examples it can be argued that a moral question mark hangs over trends in which church leaders centre decision-making and resources around their own project ideas, while treating the laity as a kind of voluntary labour to make those projects take shape.

There is evidence to show that Christian groups can support communities to campaign for social justice, a classic example being the liberation theology movement in which churchmen assisted ecclesial base communities to become politically active. Although it is doubtful that this movement could be duplicated in British society with its secular trends, higher living standards and existing democratic structures, the liberation theology movement at least demonstrates that clergy can recognise the call for justice in the scriptures and be motivated to assist the people in resisting injustice and seeking fairer conditions. In Britain this is perhaps best evidenced by the part played by churches in community organisations like the London Citizens Network, which has campaigned for social improvements such as the Living Wage (Citizens UK 2010). Walsh's (1998) account of the campaign against the battery crushing factory describes how leaders of a Christian mission gave residents the necessary support to combat an unjust situation in their locality. And in the Diversham Intentional Community, I encountered a faith group that expressed its views on justice with actions that attracted non-believers to get involved. Although this was mainly to do with

global issues such as fair trade, one wonders whether the same faith group could turn its attention to local issues and inspire residents to take part.

It is worth considering what churches might learn by reflecting upon the social justice aspect of participation. Taking my fieldwork at Somerside as a case in point, it seemed doubtful that church leaders were sufficiently interested in the input of the laity when they held just one meeting per year for the whole congregation to meet and discuss ideas. This absence of input contrasted with the regeneration work that was taking place on the nearby Hilldown Estate. In the church, the leaders dominated projects to the point where the participants painting artwork for the church café were told what colours to use and what artist to emulate. But in the regeneration scheme a resident was encouraged to design her own flyer advertising a community clean-up day. The flyer prompted so many residents to get involved that the council investigated its design to see what lessons could be learned for its own media department. The regeneration scheme supported local residents to develop community projects and have influence over the future of their estate, while the church constrained the participation of the laity and gave them relatively little influence over the activity of the church. Leaders also undermined the work of the lay members who were running the toddler group, by introducing a competing toddler group which met in the same street on the same day. These actions reflect an over-emphasis on what the leaders were able to achieve and too little regard for the laity. The church did have an understanding that any lay member could ask support for a project idea from the church leaders. But community development practice shows that elements such as group discussions, and confidence building leading to collective action, are often necessary for projects to arise from the abilities of grassroots people. Churches could benefit from a greater level of internal social justice if these methods were used to empower lay members to implement their own action, while communities would benefit if new benevolent projects emerged from the inspiration and potential of the laity.

It is also valuable to look at ways that churches can stand up for social justice in their locality. There is the example of the London Pentecostal Church that performed an audit to ensure that a regeneration scheme was informed by community input as to where resources were needed (Lewis and Randolph-Horn 2001). Or a church might support a community campaign as in Walsh's campaign against the polluting factory. At Somerside it took a regeneration scheme to address the condition of a declining children's play area, but a church could have taken up that cause. Through a series of sermons on the place of social justice in

the Christian faith, a church could be encouraged to think more about the need to uphold justice in the community.

2. Participation as local democracy

While the principle of social justice maintains people's right to participate, the principle of local democracy speaks of how that right should carry through into structures enabling democratic participation to take place. Empowerment comes through democratic interactions that take place in resident-led groups and sometimes in partnerships with other agencies. It is strongly felt that agencies must not be permitted to disempower residents by dominating supposedly democratic processes. Community development practitioners are wary of "tokenism" in which professionals make it seem that community involvement is taken seriously when in reality it is not.

Evidence that truly democratic processes can work for communities is uncovered in the study by Docherty et al (2001). The researchers found that residents of a certain neighbourhood were more willing to cooperate with the council and community agencies in regeneration, having experienced the benefits of participation in local regeneration partnerships. (In another neighbourhood, residents were left unconvinced by the regeneration management that they had real influence over decision-making, and thus failed to acquire similar sentiments.) An interesting similarity is seen in the Porto Alegre municipal budget which resulted in an increase in membership of public institutions. In both cases the explanation seems to be that people saw that their involvement in participatory processes had its rewards and so felt motivated to become involved with civic participation in new fields. In my study of the regeneration scheme on the Hilldown Estate, the importance of taking community input seriously was confirmed. The regeneration charity placed a lot of emphasis on listening to residents and showing them that they were being heard, enabling relationships of trust to build up. The scheme resulted in the formation of a number of resident-led projects together with community leaders and volunteers. The reverse effect was seen in my case study at Diversham, where the top-down approach of the New Deal management alienated local people and resulted in much funding being wasted on things that were not wanted by the community. This left formerly active residents feeling demoralised and with less desire to get involved in community projects.

A theological rationale for greater democracy in the churches can easily get bogged down in differences of opinion over the respective roles of leaders and lay members. Yet it seems that there is a tension in the New Testament which should prevent a congregation from either

developing anti-authority sentiments or becoming too heavily dominated by its leaders. On the one hand, there is the scriptural injunction to submit to one's leaders: "Obey your leaders and submit to them (Hebrews 13:17)." On the other, there is the Apostle Paul's qualifier: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you (2 Corinthians 1:24)." Within these parameters the early church may well have operated much more as a collective than is the case today. Banks (1980: 138-39, 150) argues that the churches which Paul established were *theocratic* in organisation, with a clear democratic note due to the fact of God giving everyone something to contribute. Paul's letters to the early church instruct each person to play their part in steering the community, for example in disciplining offending members²² and instructing one another.²³ References to house churches and times when the whole faith community came together, suggest that early churches were comprised of self-contained groups that usually met in people's homes.²⁴ Moreover, Paul's guidelines for organising meetings are addressed not just to leaders but to the whole faith community.²⁵ The seemingly collectivist nature of the early church could be seen as an incentive to increase lay participation and is certainly difficult to reconcile with systems where the laity are rarely given opportunity to gather together to be heard. How far British churches would embrace the need for more internal democracy is a difficult question. In Latin America the ecclesial base communities needed to operate independently of the traditional church due to its restrictive hierarchal structure (Boff 1987). The Diversham Intentional Community similarly formed outside of the traditional church in order that it could fulfil its aims.

In Britain there have been doubts among urban theologians as to whether churches have the mindset to take enough interest in participatory approaches (Wallis 1998: 307). However, the social action group that Green (2003) supervised did operate within a church and was approved by the rest of the congregation and the church leaders. The example of this group and the information and advice centre that they established, offers evidence that new democratic structures can be introduced in a church and bring benefits in terms of personal fulfilment and new amenities for the community. Training sessions devised by Livability (2010) and Tearfund (2010) provide a framework for members of congregations to meet as a group, share their motivations and theological insights pertaining to social action, and jointly construct action plans for getting involved in the community.

²² 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 6:13; 2 Corinthians 13:1.

²³ Romans 15:14.

²⁴ Romans 6:15; 1 Corinthians 14:23.

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:33-4a, 14:39-40, 16:2-3.

There is also a theological case for churches to promote the participation of the wider community in the planning of regeneration strategies. From liberation theology comes the theme of solidarity, which is one of the essences of the story of Exodus where God leads a slave nation out of Egypt and dwells among them on their journey. Solidarity is also expressed through the incarnation in which Christ dwells among communities on earth and intervenes in their lives. Solidarity in Latin American liberation theology has meant accompanying the poor in their struggle for better conditions; in Britain it can mean supporting communities to be involved in planning strategies to improve their area. The Gospel accounts of Christ's teaching and actions indicate that compassionate action includes support for self-help solutions. As Green (2003) points out, the parable of the Good Samaritan portrays an individual receiving help until the point when he becomes able to help himself. The healing of a paralytic man shows someone being empowered to answer their own needs. Therefore churches could follow the praxis of Christ by advocating community self-help via the involvement of residents in neighbourhood regeneration. Evidence that churches can promote the participation of communities in neighbourhood schemes comes from faith groups in North Tyneside that pressed for the genuine involvement of residents in regeneration (Lewis and Randolph-Horn 2001).

Churches could learn from community development's view of participation as local democracy. In my fieldwork I found that tokenism can be as much of a problem in a church as it is in neighbourhood regeneration. Examples of tokenism can include organising meetings that people are encouraged to attend but which do not result in leaders actioning lay members' recommendations, or discourse on everyone possessing "gifts" or special abilities from God but without proper support for members to truly make those gifts effective. Some traditions may be inadvertently disempowering. For example, the Salvation Army's principle of 'see a need, then go and answer that need', could cause leaders to always focus on what they are able to provide, instead of supporting others to take the initiative. The different Salvation Army tradition that I encountered at the homeless hostel regarded participation as an aid to personal growth. I see this as an instance of how a church may find a tradition within its denomination that could form a basis for a participatory approach. Churches may also feature mechanisms that limit participation in a way that is not apparent in their official presentation. For example, the vision of a leader might outwardly encourage the greater participation of lay members but subtly steer their involvement in certain directions. Effort is required to understand why participation is important, how certain structures, traditions and historical backgrounds may inhibit participation, and what new approaches can be found to

facilitate participation. The group work approach that Green used is akin to community development's use of democratic groups to empower residents to be able to negotiate their own projects. Regular members' meetings are another way to increase input from the laity and the two approaches may be complimentary, with group work increasing the capacity, confidence and community awareness of the participants, preparing them to make a stronger contribution to the decision-making of the church.

An idea that circulated in the early days of community development, was that churches could use community development methods to empower their surrounding communities. Marchant's (2004) argument that churches are micro-enterprises with the capacity to regenerate neighbourhoods is relevant here. At the Somerside church the number of paid staff and annual expenditure were not dissimilar to the resources invested in the regeneration scheme on the Hilldown Estate. But the frustrating thing about the church was that it invested resources in duplicating facilities that already existed a short distance away. A more beneficial option might be to use resources to facilitate processes by which residents could meet and discuss starting up their own community projects. In my fieldwork at Somerside and Redwall I found that workers had interviewed residents in their homes to listen to their views. People who were interested in taking action to improve their neighbourhood, were brought together to decide upon courses of action in house groups or workshops. A network of participants built up, out of which leaders emerged who could be supported to hold the resident-led activity together. Projects that arose were unique and pertinent to the estate, being rooted in the participants' own experiences of needs. Such an approach could also overcome a church's tendency to locate all of its services in one part of the parish without noticing that issues of territoriality and mobility might preclude some residents from using those services.

3. Participation as capacity building

Community development theory places much emphasis on supporting residents to gain the necessary skills to identify community issues and devise appropriate action strategies. Initial listening and democratic skills are acquired by hearing what others have to say and by sharing ideas as a group. New learning might take place through being introduced to projects set up by other communities and hearing what those residents had found worked well. Abilities increase with experience of working on projects, and participants might be supported with training in fields such as bookkeeping or how to take the minutes of meetings. Community development theory reacts against neighbourhood regeneration

schemes that do not properly involve the community, partly because these do not permit residents to develop their own range of abilities.

Some literature notes that the capacity of individuals increased as a positive outcome of involvement in community projects. Encouraging is Greenaway and Witten's (2005) finding that individuals learned skills like critical project evaluation that they could transfer to other projects in the future. And although Dinham (2005) makes some criticisms of the New Deal for Communities, he does indicate that participation helped the individuals that he studied to grow as community members. Burns et al (2004) point out that volunteers who helped to run a LETS scheme gained employment skills in the field of administration, making it seem plausible that individuals who help with the management of resident-led projects might pick up similar skills. In my fieldwork at Redwall, managers of community facilities testified to the presence of resident activists who had become competent at communicating with local authorities and knowing what criteria would be looked at in making funding bids. The mothers who received support to set up the Redwall Alcohol and Drugs project, went on to apply their skills and experience to other projects, such as a nearby health facility. A professional at the drugs project commented on how the names of certain community activists kept cropping up in local initiatives. Meanwhile the residents who managed the Osprey House Community Association had been given formal training in subjects such as management and accounting. It is hard to prove that receiving the tuition contributed to the success of the community association, but this was certainly one of the most successful projects in the area.

A case for capacity building can be constructed from the Christian faith. Liberation theologians argue from the scriptures that God uses the poor and powerless to introduce major change. The scriptures tell the story of how Hebrew slaves were chosen to found a new nation dedicated to God, and how Christ commissioned grassroots citizens such as fishermen and tax collectors to be his hands on earth to build his church. In this way, theology suggests that ordinary people possess much potential to bring transformations when empowered to do so. It can also be maintained that Christ's followers underwent a capacity building programme to prepare them for the tasks that he gave them. The Gospels record that Christ's disciples accompanied him over several years, learning from his actions and teaching – with similarities to the way that a Jewish rabbi would train his students. With these Biblical points in mind, it comes as a surprise that there is not more support in the churches for lay members to develop their abilities to help people. Another interesting argument for capacity building can be derived from the foundational beliefs of the

Diversham Intentional Community. One element of this faith group's reasoning is that since believers are commanded to follow the radical example of Christ (John 20: 21), they need the appropriate support to become proactive in the community. Capacity building can be considered to be one such form of support.

In community development the skills of listening and sharing are gained when workers mobilise residents to meet in groups to discuss possibilities for community action. Training sessions run by Livability (2010, 2006) and Tearfund (2010) offer a forum where the key elements of listening, sharing and collectively developing ideas can be practiced. That some churches enrol on these courses provide support for a view that churches can foster these skills among their members. Also significant is Harris' (1998: 79) work which found lay leaders speaking of the importance of "building people up" and encouraging consensus behind decision-making. (Although other respondents felt that input from different people slowed the church down). Evidence that churches can also use this type of work with the wider community, appears in Farrands' (1997) account of how church workers helped residents of a tower block complex to form a tenant's group. Her account suggests that some informal capacity building occurred when first the group discovered through discussion that an action strategy could be implemented, and then, after a setback when their group leader was convicted of a serious crime, they developed the resolve to appraise what had happened and continue with their plan. It is harder to find documented cases of churches supporting bottom-up initiatives by arranging for the participants to receive formal training. One has to fall back again on the example of Green's social action group and the occasion when Citizen's Advice Bureau staff trained the group in how to operate an advice centre. After the training, the participants were able to work with people in need and assist them in finding the right help. My study of the Diversham Intentional Community uncovered an example of a faith group supporting participants to gain in capacity in a different way. Volunteers at the grocery store had been thinking about the possibility of running the store as a cooperative, so plans were made to invite other cooperative leaders to visit and teach them about cooperatives and how they work.

If basic capacity building takes place when people meet and discuss ideas about their community, then churches which exclude lay members from decision-making processes may deny them the chance to develop the initial skills needed to participate in planning community action. At the Somerside church it seemed that the leadership acquired skills and experience as they put together new initiatives while the rest of the congregation were largely left out. So just as top-down regeneration schemes leave locals unable to realise their

abilities and full potential, hierarchical structures within the church might have the same effect among a faith community. Beliefs and traditions seem to be a related factor. For example, a charismatic church that stresses spiritual empowerment might be unaware of the need for practical empowerment through informal and formal capacity building. Since evidence suggests that capacity building among grassroots people can bring significant benefits, churches might embrace ways of supporting communities to gain the capacity that they need to help themselves. One way of doing this would be to perform community development work, as it leads into informal capacity building and possible skills training in support of resident-led initiatives. In my case study at Somerside, the regeneration agent on the Hilldown Estate supported residents to develop projects through the social enterprise model. A project that has benefits for the community can receive government funding to become established as a social enterprise – a business whose profits are reinvested either into the business itself or the community (Social Enterprise Coalition 2010). The regeneration agent supported residents to assemble such projects and to go through the procedures to achieve social enterprise status. An enterprise to remove fly-tipping from the estate and other adjacent neighbourhoods emerged as an example of this. Bearing in mind that just a single community worker was performing this work with the residents, it is plausible that churches could offer the same kind of support as a way to increase the capacity of local people.

4. Participation as confidence building

Confidence building is an important part of community development, given that lifelong experiences of disempowerment can leave people lacking the confidence to use their voice or become active in their community. Theorists such as Ledwith (2005) and Woodward (2004) believe that stages of community development generate confidence when participants see the progress that they have made in acquiring the skills to work together or the potential of the collective to take action. Community development is also concerned with finding community-based ways to counter the stigmatisation of neighbourhoods which can undermine confidence, morale and self-respect.

There is some literary evidence to suggest that participation in community development can raise confidence levels of the participants. Morrison recalls how a resident involved in a regeneration scheme realised that one of its aims was to convince people that they have value and that what they have to say is really worth hearing (Morrison 2003). Other studies mention that residents acquired a sense of inclusion and empowerment after getting involved with regeneration schemes (Hughes and Carmichael 1998; Dobbs and Moore 2002). In my

fieldwork I saw evidence that community development theory is correct to treat confidence building as a precursor to community action. Low confidence was apparent in many ways at Somerside and Redwall, for example with individuals embarrassed to mention where they live, or constructing an alternative set of values by which to raise their self-esteem. According to the CORE report for Redwall, the lack of civic engagement at Redwall compared to other wards, cohered with a government study linking low confidence to poor educational qualifications. And at Somerside the popularity of the computer course in the pub was accompanied by participants' comments that they would feel self-conscious taking the same course in a learning centre. On the Hilldown Estate, community action commenced after much reiteration that residents had a lot to offer and that their ideas were important. One individual commented that prior to the scheme she had never thought that she could be helping to plan neighbourhood regeneration. In both the computer course and the regeneration work, residents took part when confidence building and other factors helped to address the barrier of low confidence.

From a theological perspective, the importance of confidence building can be articulated in terms of the earlier mentioned theme of liberation that is part of Christ's mission and the mission of the church. A type of liberation occurs when residents who were once incapacitated by low self-confidence, become able to take ownership of local problems and join in efforts to improve their neighbourhood. Through seeing the changes that they can make, people whose low self-esteem inhibited them from taking steps such as enrolling on work training courses, might gain the confidence to take more control over their lives. An individual whose confidence has been raised through involvement in a resident-led community project, may be less inclined to put up with domestic violence from a partner. Therefore churches have good reason to take an interest in what action can be taken to liberate communities by way of raising confidence and countering the effects of negative stereotypes and life experiences.

Walsh's discussion of how a Christian mission spearheaded a campaign against a polluting factory, illustrates that faith groups can perform a confidence raising role through the mobilisation of residents, rather as Ledwith and Wallace suggest. The community's confidence to step up their action grew as more residents got involved and the campaign became better organised. In some cases this rise in confidence was associated with skills increases, as in the case of the resident who learned how to communicate with professionals by helping to manage the campaign. At the Somerside church, the Toddler Group was run by lay members who had used this or similar groups for their own children. They had gained

hands-on experience of interacting in a playgroup setting as parents, which had given them confidence to take on the management of this group. In other words, the one instance where working class lay members were found to be managing a community service, was where a form of confidence building had inadvertently taken place.

Churches have reason to learn from the confidence raising component of community development practice. When the regeneration scheme at Hilldown started, some staff in local public services were critical of its focus on resident-led activity. It was claimed that such a bottom-up scheme work could never work with this particular community. Yet the regeneration agent showed that it was indeed possible to energise residents of Hilldown to create a range of very valid projects. His strategy began with securing the confidence of residents in the regeneration process, by showing them that their views and ideas were really being heard. This then allowed relationships of trust to form, permitting him to address apathy in the community by challenging residents to take ownership of local problems and do something about them. A second type of confidence building occurred as individuals saw that their efforts could make a difference, and a successful neighbourhood clean-up operation added a morale boost for residents to plan more ambitious activities. In the same way, the lay members of a church might appear apathetic about taking on leading roles or setting up projects under their own initiative. But if community development practice is applied within the church to stress that people's ideas are important, and to elevate confidence in their own capabilities, new activists might come to the fore. A church that resembles Harris' voluntary associational model, with members coming in search of religious goods, could be transformed.

In my fieldwork I saw features of church that may subtly work against members' belief in their own capabilities. An absence of participation in decision-making could send out a message to lay members that their ideas are not worth hearing, and other factors such as sermons and websites that broadcast the credentials and visions of the leaders while not mentioning the capacity or aspirations of the laity, may have a similar effect. On the other hand, churches are well placed to practice confidence building, as personal self-esteem can be reinforced by a theology of the special abilities or "gifts" that God has given to each person. These are beliefs that could encourage participants to become more active, once the relevant opportunity structures are provided. If churches were to take on a community development role in their surrounding communities, confidence building would be a key component of this work. The churches in my first two case studies overlooked the fact that resident-led projects could raise the confidence of the surrounding communities where poor

self-esteem linked to stigma was known to be a problem. A church's weekly programme of prescribed services cannot achieve that. Therefore, if it is accepted that Christ's commission to the churches includes the liberation of people, churches might give thought to community development as a way to liberate those communities whose low confidence serves as a lifelong form of bondage.

5. Participation as consciousness raising

Community development theory maintains that it is important to raise levels of consciousness as to how life experiences are connected to structures and ideologies of oppression. Consciousness raising can take place as a group activity, with participants sharing personal stories and tracing experiences of life in the neighbourhood back to the causal factors. The group may develop a collective conscience and a better understanding of how community issues are connected to societal forces. This new found political consciousness can then be valuable in constructing action strategies aimed at tackling local problems.

There are some real life examples of consciousness raising in community development that have taken place. Greenway and Witten (2005) write of how Maori communities in New Zealand were invited to discuss the impact of colonisation on their native culture and what could be done to remedy its effects. The dehumanising tendency for society to treat western culture as the dominant norm, was countered by revitalising the Maori traditions and customs that formed a bedrock for community life. Morrison's encounter with a resident involved in neighbourhood regeneration, found that she was conscious of the way that negative stereotypes of the community were internalised and undermine feelings of self-worth. This participant was involved with measures to send out an alternative message that local people and their ideas had real value (Morrison 2003: 156). In my case studies a similar development was happening on the Hildown Estate, with young people forming and leading a drama group to explore the ways that they were depicted by others and what effects these portrayals had.

Liberation theology shares with community development a belief in consciousness raising, largely due to the common influences of Marx and Freire. The theology has traditionally accepted the Marxist view that the poor must become aware of how conditions of exploitation are perpetuated, in order to be able to overthrow these exploitative systems. That view is then linked with concepts such as God using the poor as agents of transformation. While it is doubtful that churches in Britain would accept much of the

philosophy of Marx, a reasonable case for consciousness raising can be made. For one thing, assisting communities to discern socially oppressive factors so that action can be taken, is a possible response to the task of liberating people which Christ passes on to the church. But a simpler rationale would be just to consider the words of the Old Testament Prophets. In the book of Isaiah, the God of Israel looks at the society of the day and is appalled to find that there is no social justice and nobody prepared to confront this situation (Isaiah 59:14-16). The requirement that justice is done necessitates an inquiry into the case of the oppressed and the background factors that contribute to their unjust treatment. With the right kind of support, communities can become more aware of how oppressive forces are at work in the neighbourhood and devise ways of responding to them. In urban theology literature there has been some agreement that communities should be supported to identify and challenge structural sin. Significant is Erskine's (2004) comment that communities need to be heard instead of constantly being told by churches what it is they need. Residents may already have some awareness of some oppressive factors that cause problems in their area, which could be developed into a more comprehensive picture.

An argument that faith groups can play a part in consciousness raising might begin with the liberation theology movement, with its ecclesial base communities that grew in political awareness and challenged unjust governmental policies – often in unison with left wing political groups. The movement provides evidence that church workers can support grassroots people to develop strong political understandings of the causes of local problems. Drogus (2000) has written of how in the 1970s, contact with clergy in the liberation theology movement led some women to challenge disempowering gender stereotypes through their organising of activities, and this pattern continues in the Jinocua base community where women have broken with tradition by developing the community's self-help initiatives (Fundahmer 2010). In Britain, the tenants' group that Farrands (1997) helped to set up, enabled residents to piece together perspectives on how their housing disadvantages were traceable to inadequate provision on the part of social landlord. This new outlook then formed a basis for demanding improved conditions. A different example is found in another faith group, the Centre for New Creation, which aimed to raise consciousness among the privileged classes over the oppression of the poor. The centre considered how commonly held notions of the poor as being unable to organise their own self-help, led to forms of disempowerment where aid is prescribed, rather than supporting the poor to address their own needs. This form of consciousness raising resulted in some individuals travelling abroad to offer their skills to the poor (Rader 2008). Of the three faith groups that I studied, the

Diversham Intentional Community seemed closest to acting out the principle of consciousness raising. In addition to its window displays that highlighted global forces of oppression, it was not unusual to hear conversations on local politics from some of the key people, including discussions of the New Deal for Communities. However, there were no exercises specifically designed to reflect on structures of oppression.

It could be a challenging experience for churches to explore what might be learned from the principle of consciousness raising. During my fieldwork, I found much scope for reflection on how disempowerment take place through authority types, organisational structures, motivations and discourses within the church. Both the charismatic authority that I encountered at Somerside and the autocratic system at Redwall, seemed contrary to empowerment. Meanwhile the narrative that I heard which maintained that Christianity concerns one's relationship with God and has nothing to do with participation, looked very likely to disempower. Even in the Diversham Intentional Community, there were mechanisms that dissuaded the group from evolving beyond certain boundaries, such as 'behind-the-scenes' decision-making and the use of liturgy that reinforced the intentional community's foundational commitments. In my first two case studies I found that lay members seemed not to have a strongly felt narrative as to what the local community needed, with many members deferring to whatever version of community was prescribed by the leaders. At Somerside a common reply to ideas on the topic of community was: "Talk to the Rector about it". How far this was due to individuals not having given the matter much thought, and how far it was a way of thinking conditioned by the church itself, is difficult to tell. But if churches are to support their wider communities, it would be valuable to have workshops where members deepen their own understandings of community, and for members to broaden their horizons so as to empathise with ways that residents understand the community for themselves.

Churches that wish to perform community development work could begin to explore how consciousness raising can be practiced in neighbourhood regeneration. At Hilldown and Redwall, community work that asked residents what they liked and disliked about their neighbourhood, helped local people to derive perspectives from their own experiences rather than succumb to external accounts of the estate. This was a starting point for challenging and disproving the assumption of outsiders, such the view that a community has no capacity to support itself and that the neighbourhood can never change. Rejecting false perceptions allows the true causes of problems to rise to the surface, as in the social landlord that collects rents each month but neglects to maintain the children's play equipment in the park. A

church located close to where regeneration work has been going on, might be able to invite some active residents to come and talk about how they have become more politically aware through the work that they have been doing in their community.

6. Participation as appreciation of community assets

Community development stresses that communities already possess certain assets including local knowledge and experience, as well as skills and long term presence in the area, which they are able to bring to neighbourhood regeneration. For these reasons, residents are in some respects better placed than professionals to provide information regarding the community's strengths and needs. In 2001 the Standing Conference of Community Development listed as one of its core values, the appreciation of the skills and knowledge that all individuals contribute to the community development process.

Examples of community participation illustrate how communities have knowledge and skills which can be integrated into neighbourhood schemes. Minton (2007) writes of an instance when residents were supported to get involved in local services management, and subsequently discovered that money was being wasted on maintaining a playground and emptying dog litter bins that did not exist. And Brent (2009) indicates that the contributions of Southmead residents brought positive changes such as new provisions for young people on that social housing estate. The abilities of local people also came across strongly in all three of my case studies. At Somerside I attended a fun day organised by residents of the Hilldown Estate which raised more than £800 for other community projects. Nearby, the Time Bank had teams of local volunteers with DIY and gardening skills that regularly made a difference to quality of life by improving people's living conditions. At Redwall the abilities of residents led to the creation of two of the most significant services in the neighbourhood: the Redwall Alcohol and Drugs Service and the Osprey House Community Association. At Diversham I discovered that residents had created an action forum with a host of community projects, which were sadly obliterated when the New Deal staff took over. In fact, the Diversham New Deal for Communities illustrated the consequences of *not* appreciating community assets, as professionals devalued local skills by ignoring input from the community and thus wasted money on unhelpful projects. They also set up services that competed with those already run by residents, thereby undermining the work that the residents were doing.

As Sheppard (1982) has pointed out, the Christian faith affirms that ordinary people have abilities which they can use for the good of their community. After all, the scriptures make

many references to God commissioning everyday citizens such as herdsmen and farmers to perform important tasks. The liberation theology movement obviously has a long tradition of believing in the abilities of the poor, so much so that Latin American clergy adopted the theology of accompanying the poor in their self-determined action. That belief was later justified as some of the ecclesial base communities went on to develop vital infrastructure such as schools, worker cooperatives and water systems. Likewise, urban theologians have commented on the local knowledge that residents are able to bring to neighbourhood regeneration. Green (2003) writes that since community members know what values hold their community together, they should be given a central role in decision-making, while Erskine (2004) notes that communities know what issues they face and where their own strengths lie. In Britain the work by Walsh and Farrands recognised that residents have the capacity to campaign for better conditions, while Green's work recognised that the local residents who attended his church possessed abilities that they could translate into social action.

Churches can learn from community development's belief in the capacity of grassroots people. Although the Christian faith recognises that everyone has personal abilities, there was a tendency in my first two case study churches for the ability of the congregation to be treated as a resource pool for church leaders to dip into. This type of recognition does have its value. It meant that the Redwall Salvation Army Corps could set up a Lunch Club by recruiting two of its members known to be competent cooks. It meant that the church at Somerside could attract new members and perhaps direct their abilities towards serving a disadvantaged community. But there is a difference between recognising assets as a resource pool for leaders to use, and recognising the independent potential for community assets to be effective when people channel their abilities into their own projects. When churches operate with only the first kind of recognition, the use of community assets is largely confined to projects that the leaders have in the pipeline. At the Somerside church, the leadership rarely saw the need to ask advice from the laity, even though lay members would have useful local knowledge in areas such as what prices were affordable at the café, or what artwork residents would want to see on its walls. At Redwall, close to the Salvation Army Corps, were projects that offered multiple proofs of the abilities of local people to construct their own welfare initiatives. Yet this made little impression on the leaders who invariably organised services around their own ideas, without investigating whether lay members and other associates could plan and implement new types of service if given the chance.

Appreciation of community assets might extend to a realisation that with these assets, there comes the need for people to be able to develop their abilities for personal fulfilment, as originally theorised by Maslow (1943). At Redwall, some individuals commenting in the CORE report expressed a desire that individuals be supported to “make more of themselves”, while two residents elected to the Neighbourhood Partnership told me of the sense of satisfaction that they acquired from performing that role. According to a report by the Church Army and the Leveson Centre (2008: 33-5), elderly members of a church should have the option to use their abilities in running activities for themselves. Therefore the philosophy of care practiced at the Redwall Corps, perhaps did not sufficiently grasp either the potential of local community assets or the fact that some community members need to utilise the abilities that they have.

There is a danger that an emphasis on supernatural phenomena such as visions as forms of guidance, can lead to an underestimation of the local knowledge available within a community. To avoid this, a church might resolve to be informed both by supernatural and grassroots sources. The employment of outreach workers understandably leads to expectations that they will be doing things to justify their positions. But this can lead to top-down forms of organisation that focus overly on the capabilities of the paid staff. Churches that are very orientated towards meeting basic needs may overlook people’s need to develop their abilities and participation as a way to fulfil that particular need. A broader understanding of human needs related to participation would be helpful here. A charismatic leader or the leader of a hierarchical church can avoid causing decision-making to revolve too much around their own ideas, by seeing the special value of organising church so as to empower grassroots people to develop their abilities in project planning. With regard to changes that could be made to empower the laity, there is the possibility of forming a social action group like the one that Green set up for those interested. Another option would be to follow the example of the Diversham Intentional Community in ensuring that projects have a team that anyone can join. Project teams can hold meetings that give volunteers an opportunity to be involved in the running of the relevant project. In the intentional community some individuals had been inspired to put ideas into action after gaining a sense of ownership of the work through its team meetings. The intentional community generally provided an environment with structures and foundational values designed to encourage members to take the initiative.

In the surrounding neighbourhood, churches could explore the strengths of the community to see what local assets could be nurtured. At Redwall, residents had indicated in

the CORE report that social ties with family and friends were an important part of their lives. If the Redwall Corps could facilitate a resident-led project, then the parents who attend its Toddler Group might have close friends, relatives or neighbours on the estate that would be willing to become involved. Often small achievements lead to bigger changes. The participation of residents in the clean-up operation on the Hilldown Estate was followed by residents hosting community events attended by hundreds of people. So supporting residents to accomplish simple things can open the door for them to recognise their own assets and redouble their efforts to use their own abilities. With long-term presence in the area, as well as funds and volunteers, churches may be in a stronger position than regeneration agencies to provide ongoing support for these resident-led groups.

7. Participation as respect for local cultures

Community development considers it important that practitioners respect local cultures and do not impose their own external values and cultural beliefs onto the communities and participants that they are working with. The community worker must be adept at interacting with different cultures and working with these people's customs and traditional ways of doing things. Projects to celebrate and reinforce local cultures are important for generating a sense of shared identity at the heart of collective action.

Testimony to the importance of working with local cultures in community development is found in Greenaway and Witten's (2005) meta-analysis of projects in New Zealand. The researchers found that projects with Maori communities grew in strength when they drew from the local experience of Maori people and their customs and traditions. These ingredients fostered a shared identity and sense of purpose. In my case studies, the nearest equivalent of this could be found in the local youth work. The hip hop dance project at Redwall, which culminated with a teenage team winning the world hip hop dance championship, had started by focussing upon a popular culture that the young people identified with. Parallel to Greenaway and Witten's findings, the success of the project owed much to the way that it incorporated the participants' culture. At Somerside, two initiatives that were very successful were a music project and a talent show called "Somerside's got Talent", which similarly featured styles of dance and singing that young people could relate to. One of the residents who organised the music project said, "We're supporting the young people to acknowledge their own culture."

In liberation and urban theologies, respect for local cultures can be built around the theme of showing solidarity with the poor. The narrative of God dwelling among the Israelites in

their exodus out of Egypt and the account of Christ having been born among the poor, offer support for an expression of solidarity that involves living alongside people and adjusting to their particular culture. Urban theologians speak of crossing cultural boundaries to be able to show solidarity with others. Green (2003) points out that in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a Samaritan traveller breaks with cultural conventions by coming to the aid of a Jewish man. Obviously a view that purely recommends the crossing of cultural boundaries, makes no demands that cultures be changed in order for people to receive help. An interesting model for respecting cultures is supplied by the Apostle Paul, who wrote that when engaging with people of different cultures and social backgrounds he took care to follow their customs and norms (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Here then, is a scriptural example of someone adapting to the cultures of the communities that he served.

The activity of some of liberation theology's base communities may be the closest thing in Christianity to using culture to foster a sense of shared identity and collective purpose. Hebblethwaite (1993) writes of base communities that actively recounted their cultural history, as an aid to defining their identity and deciding together how they intended their future to unfold. Celebrations of local culture have been used to reinforce identities in base communities whose members were descendants of the original native Indian inhabitants of Latin America.²⁶ In Britain most churches will practice some degree of respect for local cultures. Public activities such as Sunday worship and Lunch Clubs attract people of different backgrounds, and churches necessarily have to interact with them in ways that they can appreciate. I noticed some examples of churches building bridges with different cultures in my fieldwork. The boys' football team that was run by a member of staff from the Redwall Corps was a nice example of a church finding common ground with the wider community. At Somerside the church leaders attended a barbecue at a local pub and encouraged some of the congregation to go along. And at Diversham the intentional community organised interfaith work that sought to build respect between faith enclaves in a very culturally diverse community, by inviting their representatives to meet and listen to each others' faith perspectives.

It is wise for churches to consider in depth how the community development principle of respecting local cultures might apply to their work. At Somerside the Rector and Outreach Directors were prone to expecting the congregation to take ownership of their plans as a matter of course. With their different social class backgrounds this approach risked

²⁶ Hebblethwaite's account contrasts with Burdick's criticism that racial prejudice prevails within the base communities.

superimposing an outlook with cultural assumptions that differed from those of local people. Sometimes the plans or actions of the leaders expressed values that did seem to differ from the local culture. An example would be the decision to decorate a church café in a working class area with artwork reproducing the style of an obscure modern artist. A memorable incident occurred when the male Outreach Director visited the local takeaway that was threatened with demolition, signed the petition for it to stay open, but then also posted his opinion over the internet stating that the takeaway and video shop were ugly and *should* pulled down. This view was contrary to the wishes of many in the community, and local strength of feeling was one of the factors that eventually saved the two shops. Leaders could do better by incorporating local cultures into the profile and outlook of the church, as community development indicates that drawing from local cultures generates more interest from the people and a stronger sense of ownership of the work. One obvious way to do this would be to involve lay members in planning church projects and incorporating their input in setting out the vision of the church. A couple of evidences at the Redwall Corps, suggest that crises can occur when churches impose values that clash with cultural norms that people use to inform their behaviour. There is the story told by the individual who tore up her Salvation Army vows after realising that she had broken them with a visit to the pub. There is also the time when the cooks were criticised by the Captain for using a local figure of speech but firmly stated that they would not be changing their dialect. On both occasions the individuals concerned made an emphatic decision to retain their cultural norms, which serves as an indication of the importance of these. Such incidents suggest that the principle of respecting local cultures can be helpful simply in preventing harm being done.

The same principle is useful regarding the work of the church in the wider community. Staff at the Redwall Corps had to adhere to distinctive Salvation Army traditions, even though their church was located within a community that valued its homogeneity. That situation may be a factor contributing to the low numbers of people attending that church. But if ways could be found to incorporate local culture into the Redwall Corps' profile, the cultural contrast would be softened and people might relate more easily to its activities. One possibility would be to ask those who attend the Redwall Corps if they would form a group to supply their own news updates and photos of its activities to the community magazine. Some cultural perspectives would undoubtedly find their way into the representations through patterns of discourse and points put across. In my fieldwork I found that lay members held a less doctrinal outlook than the leaders over the work of the church, but complied with the moral values of the church's work. Therefore lay members might be better

able than the leaders to articulate the valuable work of the church in a language that other locals can readily appreciate.

8. Participation as networking

The importance of constructing and making use of people networks is mentioned by community development literature. Work that brings community members into contact with each other to participate in neighbourhood regeneration can build and strengthen social ties in the community. The network of participants that builds up is the source of collective action in development but also serves to increase the social capital that residents can accrue from their web of relations with others. Further stages may extend the social network, by bringing together different social groups or linking communities with institutions such as voluntary organisations and council departments to act as regeneration partners.

Examples of participation often show communities working in partnership with agencies and professionals in various formats. Useful is Ashworth's (2002) summary of the Nottingham Community Council Partnership, which found that it is challenging but possible to forge a successful partnership comprising city residents and members of the voluntary, public and business sectors. Steps were taken to ensure that residents were able to interact with different sectors on equal terms to produce a series of practical projects. Majee and Hort's (2010: 417, 421) study of a North American worker cooperative, shows how networking with professionals can be highly beneficial. The study found that interactions with such professionals as business leaders and community organisation directors, linked cooperative members with key individuals and resources beyond the cooperative. This led to a growth in self-confidence as well as "business and community confidence", better negotiation skills and greater civic engagement. In my case studies I saw examples where social networks had produced benefits for the community. At Redwall the members of a football team and social club had joined forces to form the Osprey House Community Association, and were later linked in with professional help in areas such as accounting and architecture. They also received ongoing support through contact with the neighbourhood management office. Similarly the Redwall Drugs and Alcohol Project evolved through the efforts of residents combined with professional expertise. Meanwhile the Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership represented a useful working relationship between residents and institutions such as the police and council departments. Supporting residents to provide social activities increases the scope of people in the community to form these social ties. On the Hilldown Estate, the outdoor fun events organised by a resident-led group were well attended

by the local community – this in an area where it had been reported that social exclusion and poor community cohesion were characteristic problems.

In Christian theology the desirability of nurturing social networks can be argued from the model of the early church. The New Testament indicates that the early church was composed of communal groups which held unifying activities such as shared meals and regular fellowship meetings (Acts chs. 2, 4). Boff and Boff (1987) draw attention to the fact that the apostles pooled their resources so that nobody among them would be in need. Evidently the networking of the early church equipped it not just for worship but to function as a mutually supporting collective. With this in mind, it would be a benevolent idea to want modern communities to have strong social networks. Furbey et al (2006: 9) write of how Christ condensed the Old Testament laws into the core values of love for God and love for one's neighbour. These values would endorse the formation of supportive partnership arrangements between different groups of residents and institutions. Another interesting point is Garner's (2004) suggestion that the Trinity can be seen as a model for regeneration partnerships. Just as the one social God is expressed through the three persons of the Trinity, so networks made up of multiple partners can be animated by a shared ethos of compassion for the community.

Churches already function quite naturally as instruments for building social capital, as they attract members who then make contacts with other people at the church. Holman (1998) writes of the support and new friendships that residents of an estate were able to forge from conversations that took place in a Salvation Army centre after worship. Furbey et al (2006) note that many faith groups build links with the wider community through their activities in the public domain. In addition, faith groups provide buildings that can be used for activities where all kinds of people in the community can meet and integrate (cf. Davies et al 2008: ch. 3). In these ways churches already produce some of the raw materials needed for community action. I found that in the Diversham Intentional Community, the participation of lay members could be especially useful for strengthening social ties and linking people in with the group. This was because individuals derived a greater feeling of acceptance or inclusion as a result being able to get involved in the regular discussions, or by having their project idea taken seriously and implemented. I see this as an advantage of participation that the less empowering churches may miss.

Having a better grasp of the value of social networks might inspire churches to consider what options are available to foster such networks in the community. I found that the people who attended the Redwall Salvation Army Corps were fragmented into different groups of

people attracted to different types of service provision. One option would be to invite these groups to come together to see if they would like to discuss ideas for helping the community. There is a chance that a new resident-led group could form, out of which individuals could acquire a sense of purpose and empowerment as members of this collective. The churches in my first two case studies had some connections with interagency groups. For example, at Somerside one of the church's Outreach Directors liaised with secular organisations in the planning of Healthy Lifestyles Week. At Redwall the Captain of the Salvation Army Corps attended an interagency meeting that discussed what was needed in the area. However, the lay members of these churches seemed not to have any contact with the interagencies. This led to a form of networking in which external agencies sometimes held more influence over areas of church activity than most of the church members. An alternative arrangement would be for church leaders to support lay members to form a social action group and introduce them to the outside agencies working to regenerate the neighbourhood. The expertise of agencies would still be influential but without omitting what local people have to offer. Lay members who wanted to be active in their community would become acquainted with outside resources and organisations able to support community self-help projects.

Whether one is talking about projects that involve church members or people in the wider community, there is the danger that working with partner agencies can lead to the domination or co-option of grassroots initiatives. At Somerside the Community Link Coordinators described the battle that agencies face each year to justify ongoing funding, making it is easy to see how an agency might use its links with active residents to try to draw them into using its own services. A Councillor for the Hilldown Estate spoke of the previous regeneration scheme where community agencies had come and exhausted the funds without finding out whether or not there was a need for their services. Such findings suggest that agencies can be prone to prioritising their own needs in the name of regeneration. Churches could play an important role in safeguarding against such problems by keeping a watchful eye to ensure that regeneration partnerships treat residents with equality and respect.

Challenges concerning participation and the churches

It would be undesirable to argue the case that churches can adopt the participatory principles of community development, without considering the potential risks and problems. One thing that should not be overlooked is the important work that church leaders already perform. In my case studies the abilities of the leaders were very apparent, and church leaders were often the key drivers behind the launch of new welfare services for the community. The welfare

services provided, helped to ameliorate the effects of unjust features of society such as the neglect of the elderly. The blend of charismatic and traditional authority at the Somerside church, and the autocratic system at the Salvation Army Corps, placed limits on participation but also served to make welfare provision effective in many ways. At Somerside, the drive of several of the church leaders meant that new projects could be set up rapidly, while at Redwall, the Salvation Army Corps had structures and traditions that were ideal for responding to basic needs in a deprived area. The Captain of the Redwall Corps said that having “speed to do things” was an advantage resulting from the lack of bureaucratic process, and I felt that the kindness of the Salvation Army staff was an important quality that should not be impeded in its practical expression. And so there is a risk that efforts to introduce more lay participation to a church might compromise the effectiveness of the current system. Indeed, Harris (1998: 79) records a few interview statements from lay members saying that democratic input and differences of opinion slowed down the activity of the church. Other evidence that participation can reduce efficiency comes from an interview with a priest, who felt unable to realise the goals set by the laity but also unable to dissent from those goals (ibid: 93).

While the above problems present a challenge, it is tempting to suggest community development as part of the solution. The practice of using group sessions to empower individuals could arguably be added to a church without obstructing its main organisational system. In the neighbourhood regeneration work that I saw, the empowerment of residents in collective groups interfered little with existing forms of neighbourhood management but *did* produce additional resources to help tackle problems. In contrast, the difficulties that Harris discovered came from conflict between church leaders and laity within the same organisational sphere. Harris also records comments pertaining to the need to empower people to participate and for leaders not to be too “high powered”, with some mention of the battle to secure more power for the laity (1998: 97, 101). The democratic group work or project team approach could be one way of providing empowerment without impeding other important organisational structures within the church. It may also address the problem of congregations setting impossible goals for the church to fulfil. If the participants’ set goals that they themselves aim to achieve and also engage in project evaluation, the whole process could lead to more realistic expectations.

Difficulties associated with active citizenship in the secular world tend to find equivalents in the church. Critics of secular participatory schemes point out that many people do not want to participate, leaving a minority of people to do all the work. Notions of the

transformative power of communities need to be grounded in reality, as communities have finite levels of time and capacity. In my questionnaire work at Somerside, and in the CORE report for Redwall, people gave time limitations as one of the major reasons for not participating in civic activity. Harris (2005: 81-2) similarly observes from her interviews that churches can find it hard to encourage lay members to take on responsibilities. Lay members often face time constraints due to family commitments, and those who get involved can quickly become overburdened. In the context of the church, there are many explanations for lack of motivation to participate. Reed's dependency theory (1969), Harris's (1998) voluntary associational model, and Etzioni's (1998) utilitarian model, would all argue that people attend a church in order to get, rather than to give something. From a community development viewpoint, low confidence and lack of self-belief might be given as an additional explanation. It would be supported by my discovery of low confidence among working class people at the Somerside church, and Harris' (1998: 98-100) interviewees where respondents commented on the lower participation of working class members and the need to build members' confidence in their capabilities.

The above points suggest that participatory schemes in the church or the wider community could easily fall short of expectations. On the other hand, I saw in my fieldwork that community development can be effective at prompting participation from unexpected quarters. While some documented examples of community development record their own successes, the work that I saw on the Hilldown Estate resulted in much active citizenship from formerly inactive residents. The key ingredients seemed to be confidence and capacity building, as well as constructing relationships of trust in order to tackle apathy by challenging residents to take ownership of local problems. Similarly the researchers who compiled the CORE Report for Redwall, reported many positive responses when interviewees were asked whether they would like to join workshops on solving local issues. The presence of utilitarian motives in a faith community or in the wider community, clearly does not preclude the possibility that individuals can become enthusiastic about participation once they understand more about it.

One of the greatest challenges may lie in trying to persuade church leaders to give a different approach a chance. Obama (2007) writes of his time as a Chicago community organiser, when he endeavoured to involve churches in campaigning for improvements to their area of the city. Church leaderships and congregations were often set in their ways, reluctant to alter their agendas, and sometimes quick to pull out when efforts seemed fruitless. Contacting church leaders as a way of mobilising residents who belonged to

churches, did not prove as effective as rallying the local community directly. Although Obama's recollections include church workers listening to the community and fighting for their rights, as well as churches joining coalitions to campaign over issues such as unemployment and school reform, the process of winning churches over to a cause is remembered as a long and uphill struggle (ibid: 150, 225-6, 273-4, 289-90). In British society, where secular trends present a problem to the survival of the churches, a key issue is the question of how churches can make inroads into the community. If it could be shown that community development offers a means by which inroads can be made, this might be one of the most persuasive arguments to convince churches to change.

With regard to churches extending a community development approach to the wider community, one obstacle might be the perception that behind efforts to mobilise residents lies the motive to proselytise. With this in mind, a church could decide that its practical work in the community will be performed for compassion's sake, with the prospect of residents coming to faith seen as a welcome side effect. Participation is not guaranteed to produce the desired outcomes, and grassroots community projects can run into obstacles or collapse, leading to feelings of frustration and despondency among the participants. The obvious 'flip-side' of this is that many bottom-up projects can and do succeed. In my fieldwork I encountered both sides of the coin. Taking my case study at Diversham as an example, I was aware of individuals who derived satisfaction from involvement in projects launched by the intentional community. But then there were the local active citizens who had seen their projects taken over and destroyed by the New Deal professionals, and the intense feelings of despondency that they had felt afterwards. Participatory schemes carry rewards and risks.

Conclusion

In this thesis I identified eight main community development principles of participation. I find that it can be demonstrated from the evidence of my literature reviews and fieldwork that these principles can bring real benefits to communities. They can also be shown to have theological support from the scriptures in multiple ways. Although there are relatively few examples in literature of Christian groups demonstrating participatory principles, those examples that can be found offer evidence that churches can make the change. These points seem pertinent to the role of the church in welfare provision, as they suggest that by branching out into community development, churches can foster community well-being in new but little explored ways. That this line of action could be grounded in Christian theology

is encouraging, as it implies that churches could be as committed to the empowerment of their local communities as community development practitioners have been.

A range of ways by which churches can promote participation have been suggested. Within the church, the participation of lay members might be facilitated through training sessions, democratic groups or project teams. In the wider community, churches could practice the techniques of community development agencies in bringing local residents together to plan and implement social action. The idea of churches adopting participatory principles, brings a new set of challenges. There is importance of protecting structures that aid efficiency within churches, and the need to hold a realistic expectation of how far individuals will be able to participate. There is also the question of how to persuade churches to consider using faith-driven community development as a form of welfare provision and outreach. The Community development model itself and evidence of its practical benefits, may hold some of the answers to those problems. It is arguably a route worth pursuing for churches that want to see greater transformations in their neighbourhoods.

8. Conclusion to the thesis

In this chapter I answer my main research question: “Can churches produce the benefits associated with participation, by adopting the participatory principles of community development?” This involves responding to the four associated sub-questions that I gave in the introduction to the thesis:

1. Have community development participatory principles been found to work in wider society?
2. Can a theological case be constructed for churches to adopt these principles?
3. Could churches transform their traditional work with communities in ways consistent with community development principles?
4. Is there evidence that positive outcomes can be achieved by churches adopting a community development approach?

Also in this chapter I make some suggestions for future research and bring the thesis to a final conclusion.

Have community development participatory principles been found to work in wider society?

Although community participation has been doubted and critiqued as a developmental strategy, there is sufficient evidence to argue that participation can work. There are instances when participation enabled residents to use their abilities and local knowledge to direct resources towards real needs in their communities (e.g. Brent 2009; Minton 2007; Ashworth 2000), as well as occasions when participation increased civic attitudes and behaviour – suggesting that communities saw for themselves how democratic participation produced tangible rewards (e.g. Docherty et al 2001; Gret and Sintomer 2005). In each of my case studies I came across resident-led projects that had made a positive difference to the community. In contrast, Morrison (2003) writes of an SRB funded scheme that underrated and disempowered the residents. Interestingly, I found in my first case study that an old SRB scheme had failed to make its way into the community, so a more grassroots approach was now being taken. In my third case study, I heard of how the Diversham New for Communities had been managed in a top-down fashion and had failed to prove sufficiently beneficial because it overlooked local input. Thus I find a body of evidence to suggest that

community participation in regeneration can often prove more beneficial than alternative top-down approaches.

There are examples in the literature of individuals gaining in capacity and confidence through participation (e.g. Burns et al 2004; Majee and Hort 2010), and my fieldwork concurs that this is a real outcome of community participation. Strong evidence of capacity building appeared in my case study at Redwall, where residents had developed the skills to establish key community projects. I also found in my fieldwork at Somerside that residents of the Hilldown Estate enjoyed a significant confidence boost through being able to implement their own regeneration strategies. Some Hilldown residents had been supported to set up and run their own social enterprise projects to help their community, as a special case of capacity building. Examples of the value of consciousness raising and working with local cultures emerge in community projects with indigenous peoples in New Zealand (Greenaway and Witten 2005). In my own fieldwork it seemed relevant to these principles that young people at Hilldown had formed a drama group to evaluate how negative stereotypes impact upon them. Also, that a dance project at Redwall which had used the teenagers' own hip hop culture as its starting point, had managed to produce a world beating dance team!

The above successful examples of participation show in various ways the value of using people networks to tackle local issues collectively. They tend also to show that appropriate partnership arrangements between residents, public officials and professionals can work in neighbourhood regeneration. I saw much evidence in my fieldwork of the advantages of building up people networks. Some of the key projects in Redwall, such as the drugs and alcohol centre, had been founded by networks of local people who had wanted to see change in the area. Some other projects, such as the Eagle House Community Association, offered public activities that further generated social ties as a potential source of mutual help and a foundation for collective action. These projects had received reliable support from professional workers, as evidence that partnerships arrangements between residents and professionals can achieve good results in community projects. On the Hilldown Estate, a regeneration agent had actively brought residents together into an effective action network, which continued to develop new community projects after he had gone.

In my fieldwork I encountered many examples of community participation working for the benefit of communities and producing benefits parallel to those described in some literature. This causes me to suspect that the extent of the criticisms of participation, may owe something to the lack of documentation of successful instances of participatory principles at work. This is perhaps suggested by the view of the *Community Development*

Challenge that an evidence base on community development work needs to be compiled (DCLG 2006: 4).

Can a theological case be constructed for churches to adopt these principles?

Theological rationales for churches to adopt principles of participation can be divided into different categories. I suggest that a plausible breakdown could include the words of the Old Testament Prophets, The Kingdom of God, the teaching and actions of Christ, and other miscellaneous Christian traditions.

The exhortations of the Old Testament Prophets calling for justice to be practiced in all areas of society would support a strongly held belief in social justice. From this position it could be held that an unjust situation exists where lay people in the churches have too little power or support to effect change, or to deploy their skills and church resources to implement benevolent projects for their community. Perhaps it is that sense of justice that inspires a lay leader in one of Harris' (2005: 100-1) case studies to battle to secure more input from lay members in the church. Likewise in the wider community, justice is served when individuals have more input over decisions affecting the condition of their neighbourhood, as opposed to being seldom heard. The words of the Prophets could be considered good grounds for supporting or mobilising residents in their campaigns for justice, and lend strong support to the principle of consciousness raising, since it is sometimes difficult to tackle injustices without first probing their underlying causes.

A case can also be built around the characteristics of the kingdom of God as a theological theme. The resource pack *No Hands But Ours* encourages churches to reflect upon the character of the kingdom, in which power is used for the purpose of liberation (Kentish et al 2008). For the liberation theologian, the kingdom represents the end of oppression, offering a basis to fight oppression through collective action (Boff and Boff 1987: 52-5). This view of the kingdom would also uphold ideas that communities can challenge oppressive ideologies by formulating their own accounts of reality (Poppo 1994: 29-30). The kingdom arguably heightens a sense that the faithful must be committed to liberative justice, as the disciples were instructed to pray for the time when God's kingdom of love and justice would come. It is also important that in the scriptures, people of low social status are chosen to promote the message of the kingdom, which coheres with the principle of investing in the capacity of grassroots people to take on responsibilities (Sider 1978: 64). It is worth noting that the kingdom of God is highly participatory. In the four Gospels, grassroots people are invited to participate in this new kingdom by acting in accordance its moral statutes.

The teachings and actions of Christ may be central to a theological argument for empowering people through participation. Christ's mission, as announced in the synagogue, was not only to preach a message of spiritual salvation but to heal people and liberate the oppressed. This ministry can be seen to have passed on to the churches in the commission to continue Christ's work (Marchant (2004b: 8). In the Gospels, some of the liberation which Christ delivers to people is practical. To release an individual from a debilitating illness, or to introduce a new faith movement with fewer adherences to legalistic religious regulations, is to liberate in a pragmatic as well as a spiritual sense. Congregations might look at how they could perform a consciousness raising role so that churches and communities together can identify sources of oppression and liberate people from them. Helping communities to cast off the effects of low self-image is another form of liberation that churches might become more aware of. Other teachings of Christ lend weight to certain community development practices. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan can be seen to stress the moral value of working alongside others, while respecting their cultural differences and traditions (Green 1987: 39-43). The praxis of Christ encourages a ministry that is not about hoarding power. His decision to dwell in the minor town of Capernaum while other leaders set up power bases in the prestigious cities, as well as Christ's identification with the Servant Messiah of Isaiah chapter 53, do not sit well with a domineering style of church leadership (Green 2003: 81; Marchant 2004b: 8). And the healing of a paralysed man can be seen a motif for supporting self-help rather than keeping people in a state of dependence (Green 2003: 90-1). The Diversham Intentional Community make a good point when they refer to the Gospel of Mark's portrayal of Christ as a radical figure of action, and say that people must be supported to be proactive in the community to follow that role model.

Miscellaneous Christian traditions which support participatory principles could include the early church of the New Testament, since the balance of leadership and collectivism depicted in the scriptures appears to offer scope for greater lay participation. Significant is Banks' (1980: 138-39, 150) argument that the early church had a democratic note due to God giving everyone something to contribute, and the Apostle Paul's writings showing that each person is involved in guiding the faith community. In places the early church comes across as a supportive network and this could be seen as an incentive for wanting the wider community to develop strong social networks to foster community well-being. The theme of showing solidarity with the poor – as it appears in the Biblical story of Exodus and the nativity of Christ – can be inspirational for working alongside individuals and helping them to secure a better future for their communities. Other traditions are useful too, such as Paul's

description of how he adapted to the cultures of different people. Or Garner's (2004: 98) view that just as the three persons of the Trinity express the one social God, so partnerships between multiple different groups can promote a single spirit of care and development in the community. It seems that Christianity offers ample traditions that could be used to ground community development practice in established Christian belief.

Could churches transform their traditional work with communities in ways consistent with community development principles?

Some evidence that churches in Britain can work with community development principles of participation, comes from Christian groups that have put those principles into practice. The social action group that Green established within a church, empowered some of lay members by increasing their democratic participation. His efforts recognised the assets possessed by lay people and also resulted in some formal capacity building when members were trained by the Citizen's Advice Bureau to run an advice centre. Walsh's Christian mission that supported a community campaign against a polluting factory, began with a strong belief in social justice and recognition that the local community had capacity to stand up for itself (1998: 135-37). Walsh reports that confidence building and capacity building occurred as natural outcomes of residents' participation in the campaign. The support which Farrands' (1997) church gave residents in forming a tenant's group resulted in some informal capacity building and consciousness raising, as the group developed views on how the social landlord was accountable for some of their disadvantages and made a plan to address that situation. The example of the London Pentecostal church which took measures to ensure that local people were heard and their priorities taken into consideration, demonstrates that clergy can appreciate and support the principle of local democracy (Lewis and Randolph-Horn 2001). In a similar way, the churches that have joined community organisations like the London Citizen's Group, have demonstrated solidarity with other groups comprising city residents, in the pursuit of social justice.

On the whole though, it is hard to find documented examples of churches that have transformed their work so as to support participation to the extent that is found in community development. This may be the weakest link in the chain concerning arguments that churches could adopt a community development approach. It might be as the *Community Development Challenge* (2004) concluded for community development in general, that an evidence base on churches which have employed participatory principles is needed. This would enable more definite conclusions can be drawn. I saw little in my first two case studies to suggest

that churches could be persuaded to incorporate community development approach. The church at Somerside featured a top-down charismatic style of leadership that interacted with some utilitarian and value compliance motivations among the laity. My suggestion that there be more done to encourage lay participation, was followed by sermons that offered hope of such change but were followed by a return to the usual top-down management. At the Redwall Salvation Army Corps, the Captain's comment that this was an autocratic organisation which does not run by committee was hardly encouraging. Neither of the first two church leaderships seemed influenced by successful examples of community participation in their vicinity. Against this backdrop, one can appreciate Obama's (2007) reflections on the difficulty of persuading churches to take a new angle on community affairs.

However, a readiness among some churches to plan social action collectively and engage with communities in new ways, is suggested by those that have followed the courses provided by Livability (2010) and Tearfund (2010). On a broader level, the Latin American liberation theology movement offers evidence that church leaders can see the potential of abilities of grassroots people and the value of supporting people in self-help projects and campaigns for justice. The movement offers evidence that clergy have their potential to take on liberative roles that differ from the traditional roles prescribed by the church. In Britain the 1985 *Faith in the City* report shows how church leaders can be critical of patterns of church activity and make recommendations that prompt major change. In support of that change, several possible motives are suggested. There is Morisy's (2003: 42) argument that the church can make a greater impact with communities by supporting community self-help initiatives. There is also the rationale given by the Taking Part workshops, that in this way the church can make its welfare work beneficial to more people (Lewis and Randolph-Horn 2001: 11). Then there are the various theological arguments that can be used to support the case for participation.

When one considers the above examples of empowerment that some churches and Christian groups have been doing, it is clear that efforts to create greater levels of participation are not confined to the secular world. The same principles can and have been used in faith-driven activity. Another important point is that individuals who do not initially seek to participate, can still become interested in opportunities for involvement once it is made clear what participation is about. At least three illustrative examples of this appear in my case studies. On the Hilldown Estate, the notion that residents could be the driving force behind local change had been a new concept, but was received enthusiastically by the

community when expounded by the regeneration agent. This was especially the case when people could see participation working. At Redwall, the service users of the Salvation Army hostel had been led by their situations of homelessness or drug dependency to seek help. Despite these utilitarian motives, some of the service users became involved in democratic processes to inform the service provision and to manage the gardening projects. And at the Diversham Intentional community, I encountered individuals who had initially been attracted to the ethically sourced grocery store or the interfaith meetings, and only later found out that the participatory style of the intentional community encouraged them to plan new projects. In the same way, ideas surrounding participation may be unfamiliar to many members of a church, but that does not mean that enthusiasm for community empowerment will not be aroused, once the values base and merits of this approach are grasped.

The strongest argument in answer to this question, is that the evidence from faith-driven participatory schemes is insufficient to make a compelling case that churches can change, but sufficient to warrant a much higher level of interest and investment in the abilities of churches to perform a community development role in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Is there evidence that positive outcomes can be achieved by churches adopting a community development approach?

There are two related sets of answers to the above question. Firstly, there is an argument that churches can replicate the positive outcomes associated with community development. Secondly there is an argument that churches could use community development methods to address their own potential weaknesses. The first argument has been covered to a degree in the above examples where Christian groups empowered individuals by increasing their democratic participation and recognising the assets possessed by lay people. Relevant evidence is also found where churches have advanced local democracy by ensuring that residents are heard, or supported communities to take action. These examples offer encouragement that churches could use community development methods to produce similar results to those found in secular community development work.

As for the idea that churches might use community development to address their own weaknesses, my fieldwork suggested some possibilities to explore. Church leaders could take more interest in the ideas of the laity and work with them to create structures allowing them to have more input. After all, existing structures whereby lay members must approach the leadership to gain support for a project are restrictive. There are difficulties in assuming that all individuals have per se the confidence or experience to take action or approach

leaderships with project ideas. At Somerside this was the expected procedure for social action initiated from the grassroots up, yet the neighbourhood was one in which low self confidence among the residents was endemic. A bottom-up regeneration scheme on the nearby Hilldown Estate had required preliminary confidence and capacity building ahead of residents launching their own projects. A further limitation is that some lay members of a church would feel daunted by the prospect of shouldering the burden of project management alone. Again on the Hilldown Estate, the regeneration agent had arranged for residents to meet and discuss ideas, before they were able to take action as a collective group. The implication is that much potential for lay members to become proactive may lie dormant in the Somerside church because of the absence of methods to support their participation. A similar situation seemed true of my case study at Redwall, where the writers of the CORE Report mentioned low confidence related to stigmatisation as common problem on the estate. At the Redwall Salvation Army Corps the prospect of a budgeting class had seemingly frightened the users of the Toddler Group away. These phenomena cast doubt over a church system that theoretically allows individuals to seek support for an idea, but does not build them up so that they are ready to do so. Congregations might be challenged to examine instances of tokenism as well as disempowering structures or hidden mechanisms in the church, in order that congregations can be treated candidly and fairly. Democratic action groups that formed could result in lay members increasing their ability to make a valuable contribution to the decision-making of the church.

For a church to embrace community development principles could lead to a greater appreciation of bottom-up initiatives. This in turn, could cause leaders to be less inclined to walk over projects that local residents have started. In addition to this, my case studies at Somerside Redwall suggested that church leaders could safeguard against undermining local norms and values by having a better appreciation of local cultures. At Somerside I saw church leaders at risk of imposing an alien culture onto the community, for example by publishing statements over the internet about how facilities that were valued by local people should be demolished. And at Redwall, local figures of speech had been criticised. The church might turn that tendency on its head, by using the local culture of lay members to present the church in new ways that the wider community could relate to. The possibility of asking lay members to represent the church by writing updates to the community magazine was mentioned earlier. In some other ways it could be helpful for churches to learn more about participation approaches. I found that in the Diversham Intentional Community, participation had helped individuals to integrate into this faith group's social network and be

accepted. At the Redwall Corps, I thought that a community development approach that began gently with participants sharing their experiences of the estate, could have led to personal development opportunities for some of the regulars – as an alternative to skills workshops that can frighten people off. The same approach might be useful in bringing together different groups of service users into an overarching social network.

There were various indications in my fieldwork that church members either held utilitarian motives, or that they were unsure how to get involved in social action. I saw evidence that community development approaches can change such outlooks and attitudes, as occurred on the Hilldown Estate in my first case study. On this point, it is worth quoting the regeneration agent's own literature. In one of the documents that they have compiled to explain their methods, a resident recalls:

A guy knocked on my door and I told him where to go. I told him there's no point in doing anything, you get slagged off and the council give you grief and you probably lose your benefits. It was good to be listened to though.

I saw him again and he asked if I had thought about what I said about the druggies and the kids. He must have been listening. I went to the café with him and I was gob-smacked. He knew my mates and they were all talking about project ideas for the area. I pitched in and said what I thought. We all agreed to listen to 10 people each that week.

The following week we met and we had listened to 136 people. Lots of them saying the same. We decided to hold an event. Loads of food, a raffle and visioning. To cut a long story short we've ended up with a young people's theatre group, a dance company, an allotment for growing veg and fruit which we sell, we have a barrow and a shop and we have a team that works with all the other voluntary organisations to keep the peace.

Similarly in my study of the Diversham Intentional community, the leadership encouraged some people to make a greater contribution simply by involving them in decision-making and listening to their input. The implication is that the church could release the latent potential in ordinary people by relinquishing some top-down control and using community development methods to inspire grassroots action.

Areas for further research

Several possibilities for further investigation in the field of church and community development spring to mind. Studies of churches through a community development lens, could cast new light on the strengths and weaknesses of the church in the welfare sector. Current policy research points to the many resources that churches contribute to communities, with commonly cited assets including buildings, the provision of paid workers and volunteers, the long-term presence of churches in their areas and a religiously inspired ethos of care for the community (Home Office 2004). My own fieldwork recognises the value of all those assets but suggests that these have associated strengths and weaknesses. For example, while various sources rightly highlight the fact that churches offer buildings for community use, my fieldwork suggested that a church may become overly focussed on how to develop its buildings as a centre for outreach. This can have negative effects including the duplication of existing facilities, and the concentration of services in one part of a neighbourhood despite local issues of territoriality and mobility. By giving too much attention to how their buildings might be used to connect with the community, churches may fuel their own prescriptive attitudes towards care, which may in turn devalue local input, fail to appreciate the benefits of self-help and foster a culture of dependency. In contrast, I saw that a regeneration agent had made greater inroads into the community by listening and bringing residents together in people's homes. Public buildings were sometimes used but the perceptions and resourcefulness of the community were the focal points.

Existing literature contends that faith groups have shown themselves to be good facilitators of civic participation, for example by drawing together people of religious faiths into faith communities and organising their interactions in associational spaces (Dinham 2009: 113, 206). My own view is that statements along the lines that "faith groups are good at civic participation" need to be turned into double ended questions. In other words, how far are faith groups 'good at civic participation' and how far are they weak at promoting participation? A faith leadership that takes most of the decision-making power for itself, might add to the experiences of powerlessness that dissuade people from seeing themselves as having a role in planning social action or participating in local governance. Yet this may well be the common model of organisation.

Some policy literature mentions that many churches possess outreach workers and volunteers who perform a valuable service. However, my first two case studies found that nearly all of the action sprang from the ideas of the outreach workers and other leaders, with little thought given to how the laity could play a part in designing and implementing

services. The employment of a new outreach worker came with an expectation that they would soon be demonstrating their skills and calling, which tended to reinforced top-down forms of management. Yet the examples of community participation that occurred near to these churches suggested that one of the greatest assets of the church lies in untapped experience and capacity among the lay members. This area of study could uncover ways in which the assets of the churches might be strengthened. For example there has been some interest in the function of churches in generating social capital by providing venues for people to meet and activities by which individuals can establish new contacts (Furbey et al 2006: 19-21). If a church's programme of welfare services fragments the service users into separate groups, community development could be used to bring these different service users into contact with one another, thus increasing social capital.

An additional direction for research would be to examine ways that churches might increase participation by modifying or expanding existing features. Liberation and urban theologians have discussed in detail how Christian theology can be adapted to support principles of participation, but new research is needed on how organisational features of church systems could be adapted. Such research could promote participation by showing that these principles have partially existed in the make-up of churches and the aim is to develop them further. This is a more persuasive approach than to challenge churches to introduce something entirely new. It is noticeable that church systems both empower and disempower. My case study churches all had routes by which lay members could elicit support for a project idea, and there was also some recognition that all people have abilities and things to offer. Consequently projects did sometimes arise from the initiative of lay people. In a similar way, even in the absence of a funded regeneration scheme, grassroots initiatives occasionally emerge in a neighbourhood – out of the determination of residents to gain support for an idea, coupled with some understanding from public officials of the value of community self-help. But a neighbourhood regeneration scheme can increase resident-led projects well beyond the norm by elevating the level of local democratic involvement. It is therefore tempting to think that more grassroots action could be encouraged within the church, by expanding the half-formed structures that already support participation to some degree. A system in which lay members must approach church leaders with a project idea, would need little adaptation for it to become one where a leader is assigned the role of listening to members and supporting them to follow up their ideas. Or a church that is organised around providing for basic human needs might be persuaded to think of personal fulfilment needs that can be fulfilled through work that empowers.

A third area of research might design workshops to support churches that want to branch into community development. While it is true that some resources already exist for churches looking to engage in social action, there is greater scope to create a course that brings the best from all the related fields. Existing resource packs offer stages by which congregations can examine Christian traditions surrounding compassion and justice, and discuss ways to apply these values in the community. Examples include *Just People* by Livability and Tearfund partnership (2010) and *Amos: God's Word to a World of Injustice* (Kuhrt 2010). Some resources go further in suggesting plans to interact with the community to find out local problems and meet key residents who could be incorporated as volunteers into initiatives launched by the church. Along these lines are the *Getting to Know Your Neighbours* guide published by (Livability 2010) and the *Discovery* course offered by Tearfund (2010). These materials are useful in many ways. They provide a framework for the democratic participation of all members of a church, and emphasise the importance of local knowledge and ability in the wider community. The *Discovery* course features a problem-solving approach to community issues, which could theoretically lead to plans to empowering community self-help.

Yet there appear to be elements missing from present outreach materials. Absent are examples of participation from the world of secular community development, which would provide useful insights. Secular examples can be good for illustrating how participation and civic attitudes increased when individuals saw that they had personal capacity as well as the necessary support to achieve their goals. Secular examples also highlight some useful options, such as supporting residents to use the social enterprise model to set up initiatives, and teaching residents how to listen to other local residents. At the same time it could be argued that some of the best Christian traditions supporting empowerment do not appear in outreach resources. Liberation theology's theme of God's solidarity with the poor – as shown in the story of Exodus – is often left out. The idea that the faithful must be proactive in the community so as to follow Christ's role model would be a valuable addition.

The Freireian concentration on helping the community to construct their own narrative over their situations and the way forward does not feature strongly in current outreach guides. For example, the Livability website showcases some examples of churches that have followed its outreach materials. The examples generally describe churches discovering compassionate but prescriptive ways to serve their local community, rather than promoting self-help – although sometimes local residents become involved in what the churches are doing (Livability 2011). There is no special emphasis on supporting the wider community to

develop an independent version of life in their neighbourhood and what things should change. Deeper gains in personal development, political consciousness and effective community action might ensue if the wider community were supported to construct their own narrative for change.

There is also a need to ascertain how faith groups should work with other agencies when community development strategies involve joined-up working. Current literature indicates that poor familiarity with the theological positions of faith representatives can be an obstacle to forging efficient working relationships (Dinham 2009: 209). I find that the situation is more complex than this, since theological views differed at varying levels of the church hierarchies that I studied in my fieldwork. Key to bringing the best outcomes from faith driven community development might be an exploration of the faith views of different kinds of participants, so as to elucidate what faith factors inspire their personal social action and willingness to take part.

Conclusion

At a time when the church is rediscovering and expanding its role in the welfare sector, and governments are keen to devolve the pressure of providing services to independent organisations, it is pertinent to ask not just what *types* of human needs churches can address but what *approaches* they might adopt. The traditional role of the church in meeting basic needs is still highly relevant, while the function of churches in generating civil society and serving as partners in community organisations is of obvious value as well. But in neighbourhoods that suffer from a culture of dependency or low self-esteem related to the stigmatisation of local people, or where there are issues that are difficult to resolve without mobilising the collective abilities of communities, the option that churches might support residents to determine their own social action is worth considering. Also worth considering are the benefits to church members in terms of empowerment and self development that can ensue from churches adopting community development principles internally. Just as churches have traditionally provided social care to their own members as well as their surrounding communities, so the option to empower grassroots people as a form of welfare could be provided to church members and the wider community alike.

Real life examples of community participation show that this approach to human needs can bring many benefits. Residents become able to utilise their abilities and knowledge to address community issues and get the support they need to transform their neighbourhoods. As a result of these processes, grassroots people grow in capacity and confidence, develop

new skills and political consciousness, and in some cases are reinforced by acknowledging the importance of their own culture. Social networks that form can address a variety of needs through the joint capacity and effort of many people. Importantly, there are also Christian traditions that might inspire churches to adopt the participatory principles of community development. Examples range from the messages of the Old Testament Prophets and teachings surrounding the kingdom of God, through to the words and actions of Christ and other miscellaneous Christian traditions.

Although there too few examples of churches supporting participation in this fashion to make a compelling case, it can be argued from the evidence that there should be more in the way of investment to support churches to attempt this type of welfare provision. Exactly how churches can be persuaded to change is a big question. From my fieldwork observations I offer two suggestions. At both the Somerside church and the Redwall Corps, changes were sometimes made to the tastes of the lay members. For example, at Somerside there had been updates to the style of worship as well as technological innovations to make Sunday worship more attractive. At Redwall the mercy seat was no longer used because lay members did not wish to use it, and the Captain expressed criticism of the practice of marching brass bands through streets as it no longer attracted new people. Therefore if the value of participation was better understood by lay members, change might come by leaders responding to preferences for that way of working from the laity. Efforts to promote community development techniques might be aimed at lay members as well as church leaders, perhaps through presentations in commonly accessed media such as magazines, television or door-to-door literature. Another possibility would be to make types of funding available to community development agencies, on condition that they endeavour to give local churches a presentation on how participatory methods are being used in their neighbourhood. In this way, the concepts of participation would be communicated to the whole congregation.

More understanding must be gained in order to establish frameworks that might encourage faith involvement in community development. One report, which makes an evaluation of interfaith community development projects, stresses the need to make more funding available for this kind of successful work (Evision 2010: 133-35). What the report fails to emphasise, is the need to educate faith groups as to the merits of community development approaches. In my fieldwork I found that the imperviousness of churches to changes occurring locally in community development projects, suggested that faith leaders may not understand the merits of community development very well. The promotion,

education and funding of faith based community development are needed, and in that particular order.

One contemporary debate surrounds the question of whether faith activity should be separated from public life. An appeal to the anti-supernaturalism associated with Enlightenment thinking and the fact that competing theological agendas often cause social division, are invoked by organisations such as the British Humanist Association to argue for the prohibition of faith participation from areas of public life (Trigg 2007: 230-36). A possible counter-argument to this is that the aim of separating faith participation from the public realm could never realistically be achieved; therefore, it is better to steer public faith activity towards promoting cohesion – a plan surely bolstered by the potential for faith groups to help inaugurate the social cohesion envisaged in the Big Society. Indeed, it comes as a surprise that more has not been done to combine the assets, compassion and long-term presence of churches in their neighbourhoods, with the strengths of working alongside communities, helping them to help themselves. As was pointed out in the introduction, today's policy climate which encourages non-governmental organisations to take on roles in welfare provision, coupled with the enthusiasm of many churches to be involved in providing community care, suggests opportunities for government to be persuaded of church based community development as a major new initiative. It is interesting to think that this step could be one of the most fruitful developments to come out of this new government's vision for empowering grassroots people and communities.

Appendix

This appendix lists the main data sources in my case studies and some of the more useful points that arose from them.

Case study of the Anglican parish church at Somerside

Written sources

- Census 2001. The census provided useful information about the demography of Somerside. In particular, it showed that the community was quite homogenous, with large numbers of white residents and less than 1% of them professing to believe in a religion other than Christianity.
- Index of Multiple Deprivation 2001. This data showed that Somerside suffered high levels of deprivation relative to other areas, especially in terms of income poverty, unemployment, health and housing.
- Feasibility study for a Time Bank. This document recorded the findings of an audit of local organisations, testing the possible need for a Time Bank in Somerside and whether such an initiative would be viable. The data were useful in highlighting social problems that existed in Somerside, such as poor levels of social cohesion, low self-esteem and general apathy over local issues.
- Newspaper article. The article compared the average life expectancy in Somerside with that of a more affluent ward. The differential was an indicator of deprivation in Somerside. It also prompted a Somerside councillor to blame generational cycles of deprivation linked to young people leaving education too early to achieve good job prospects.
- Church website. Useful features of the church website included the insights that it gave into the leaders' plans for outreach in the neighbourhood and the visionary imagery that motivated them. I thought that other features such as write-ups on church leaders and their qualifications, as well as the absence of content written by the laity, could be seen as reinforcing the church hierarchy.
- The Somerside church's *Annual Report*. I noticed that this report was too complex to be assimilated and commented on during the church AGM when it was handed out. Another feature was that the report provided insufficient information on details such as expenditure on different church activities, for lay members to be able to formulate certain views. In other words, the report and the way that it was distributed seemed tokenistic more than empowering.

Participant observation

- PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings. Attending the PACT meetings provided some general background information about the case study area. The local knowledge exhibited by residents proved very useful for discussing some kinds of

community issues. This would lend weight to argument that churches should do more to bring lay members into decision-making processes, and that churches could help communities to use their local knowledge by supporting them to develop projects addressing local issues. Also noteworthy at the PACT meetings was the absence of church leaders who could have come to hear what residents were saying.

- Church services. Attending church services at Somerside enabled me to piece together some of the theology of the church, which helped me to identify it as an Anglican church influenced by the Charismatic movement. It was apparent that this was a congregation made up of different social groups, with some indigenous working class members and some middle class newcomers. A few individuals appeared to become more confident after receiving some care and attention from the church. Relevant to my analysis of the organisational structure of the church, the services appeared to contain some partially hidden mechanisms that reinforced the decision-making power of the leaders and the deference of the lay members. An example would be use of collective expressions such as “we want” to make it seem as though the intentions of the leaders were naturally the intentions of the whole congregation.
- Annual General Meeting. The most prominent features of this meeting were the ways in which it fell short of an in-depth, interactive dialogue where social action could arise out of democratic listening and sharing.

Interviews and conversations

- Interview with Community Link Coordinator 1. This interview looked at some of the problems faced in connecting residents with local services and in encouraging residents to get involved with community initiatives. Issues of territoriality and mobility in connection with the steep hillside at Somerside proved to be factors preventing access to some services. We also discussed how its more reliable funds and volunteers seemed to place the Somerside church in a stronger position to sustain projects than other welfare providers.
- Interview with Community Link Coordinator 2. This interview similarly examined some of the difficulties faced in providing community welfare. For example, the respondent thought that the presence of multiple public venues where services were provided, could be a source of confusion. We talked about the strengths and weaknesses of the church as provider of welfare services, including the availability of resources such as capital and buildings that churches possess. There was a suggestion that the association of church-based welfare with religious faith could deter some people from receiving help.
- Interview with the Rector of the Somerside church. The interview with the Rector helped to elucidate the organisational structure of the church, its theological drivers and ways in which the church operated. A key theme was the role of the church in acting out its mission as a people belonging to the kingdom of God.
- Interview with the church’s Male Outreach Worker. With similarities to my interview with the Rector, the discussion covered the kingdom of God and how the work of the church should reflect the principles of giving and healing which characterise that

kingdom. The respondent also mentioned the children's club held at the church, and the way that it had improved some children's behaviour and performance school.

- Interview with Parochial Church Council member 1. This individual did not live in Somerside but felt unhappy that Somerside suffered as a stigmatised area. A notable feature of the interview was that he repeatedly stressed a desire for the church to practice a "pastoral care" in Somerside, but without mentioning any need to listen to the community and support residents to formulate their own self-help. The discourse was compassionate but also paternalistic and prescriptive.
- Interview with Parochial Church Council member 2. Useful points to arise from this interview were the value of the church café as a place where isolated people could come to be "part of something", as well as the determination of church volunteers to continue the café in the first year when it struggled to attract customers.
- Interview with lay member 1. This interview was useful where it concentrated on the charismatic identity of the church leader and his ability to persuade some church members to volunteer. It was also interesting that this lay member had less of a sense of God guiding the faithful through a specific plan or revelation; he expressed just a general belief that the Deity expected people to be doing things to help one another. His view would support a case that theological perspectives among the laity can differ significantly from the leadership. The respondent stressed the moral value of the work of the church as his main incentive for helping out, hinting at a value compliance form of organisation of the sort identified by Etzioni.
- Interview with lay member 2. This interview was similar to the one with the first lay member, in that it stressed the charismatic identity of the church leader. The respondent was unclear about the meaning of the visionary phenomena that the leadership took as divine guidance, but appreciated its moral significance. As with Lay Member 1, there appeared to be a certain value compliance at work.
- Interview with a councillor for the Hilldown ward. Our discussion examined how a previous neighbourhood regeneration scheme had failed, mainly through a lack of face-to-face contact with the community. The interview provided evidence that local residents had ample knowledge, ideas and abilities to come together and construct their own community initiatives if empowered to do so.
- Conversation with a Somerside councillor. We briefly discussed the attitudes of newcomers to the area in comparison to older generation residents, and how there had been a corresponding loss of community spirit.
- Conversation with a teaching assistant at a Somerside school. The discussion revolved mainly around poverty in the area and how local parents struggled to ensure that their children were provided healthy meals on a budget.
- Conversation with the landlady of a pub in Somerside. This talk was directly about a computer course being held in her pub, and how that choice of venue had drawn more local participants than might be expected if it had been held at a learning centre.

- Several conversations with lay members of the church. A point to arise from the conversations was that these individuals sometimes felt that there should be greater opportunity for lay members to have influence over the activity of the church.
- Conversation with an individual at a home group meeting. An interesting point was that this person saw little relevance of democratic participation to the church, since Christianity was concerned not with politics but with one's relationship with God. The respondent also indicated that the right of freedom of speech meant that church leaders could represent the church and community in any way that they wished.

Social survey

- A quantitative door-to-door survey that I conducted to compare the work of the church and the Time Bank in Somerside. On a scale of 1 to 10, 49.8% of people gave the figures "1" or "2" to indicate that they would be unlikely to use the Time Bank. The corresponding figure for the church was 57.5%, meaning that more people would be unlikely to use the church. Thus the Time Bank appeared more popular than the church, perhaps because as some respondents indicated, the work of the Time Bank involved residents helping one another. The idea of the Time Bank seemed to have power to draw residents from further afield to make use of its services, which was something that the church lacked.

Case study of the Salvation Army Corps at Redwall

Written sources

- Census 2001. In some ways this census data resembled the data for Somerside, as it revealed a homogenous, mainly white community, with less than 1% of residents professing to believe in a religion other than Christianity.
- *Communicating on the Redwall Estate* (CORE) report. This document summarised research commissioned by the local authority to collate the views of residents in Redwall. The findings spoke of a closely knit community where many residents held similar views. People in the community appreciated the way that other residents were like themselves. This posed a challenge to the Salvation Army's efforts to make inroads in Redwall, as Salvation Army traditions differed markedly from the culture of the local community. The CORE report commented on the community's low self-esteem related to outsiders' denigrating views of Redwall, and it recorded that respondents wanted initiatives to help local people "make more of themselves". These latter points suggested that the Salvation Army might do well to use a community development approach to support Redwall by respecting the local culture, raising community pride and helping those involved in creating projects to gain new skills.
- Quality of Life Survey. Perhaps the most telling point in this survey was where it indicated a decline in residents' contentment over quality of life in Redwall. Certainly this implied that the estate had its problems which could be getting worse.

- Redwall Ward Profile. The ward profile for Redwall showed relatively high levels of deprivation and social stress as evidenced by statistics on crime, unemployment and childhood poverty, as well as low levels of education and skills.
- Community magazine. This was instrumental in detailing the welfare services that existed locally, thereby giving indications of what local needs there were. I also saw some attempts to use community pride to resist the stigmatisation of the area, which contributed to my analysis of how stigma necessitated esteem-raising community development work in Redwall. A pull-out section in one of the magazines provided information on the Redwall Neighbourhood Partnership as an example of the capacity of residents to contribute towards neighbourhood regeneration.

DVD

- A DVD documenting some projects in Redwall. The section on the Osprey House Community Centre demonstrated the abilities and initiative of the residents who managed the centre, as well as their determination to maintain services for different social groups on the estate. With around 700 members, the centre enjoyed much community support, showing that this was an effective grassroots project.

Participative activities

- Attending Sunday worship. The observation which seemed most relevant to my thesis was that some modernisation to the Sunday worship had occurred. PowerPoint displays and modern hymns were used, and the traditional mercy seat was not used. This allowed some optimism that the Redwall Corps was not too tradition-bound to make changes consistent with community development principles.
- Street walking. I saw a couple of ways in which local residents might be using pride to resist the effects of stigma. One was the use of t-shirts that made a word play on local colloquialisms, thus openly embracing the local culture. The other was the use of the St George's flag that some residents attached to their homes and which seemed to convey a sense of national pride.

Interviews and conversations

- Interview with Captain of the Redwall Corps. This accrued information as to how the Corps operates as an autocratic institution with the Captain in charge. It seemed an obstacle to the prospect of incorporating the democratic principles of community development into church practice, either among the people who attended the Redwall Corps or as applied to the wider community. However, the Captain did realise that certain Salvation Army traditions were no longer effective, suggesting that there could be some scope for change consistent with community development. A second theme to emerge in the interview was the core principle of "see and need, answer that need" that lay behind the work of the Redwall Corps. While this principle ensured efficiency in meeting basic deprivation, it failed to recognise any need for personal fulfilment. A grasp of community development principles might remedy this blind spot.
- Interview with the Chaplain at a Salvation Army Hostel. The interview focussed largely on the way that hostel users experienced some empowerment through their

involvement in decision-making structures. It was also interesting to find a Salvation Army tradition in the Hadleigh Farm colony that endorsed empowerment and self-help. The implication was that the Salvation Army church could become more empowering by drawing from this tradition belonging to its social services wing.

- Interview with the Redwall Neighbourhood Manager. This was an important source of information revealing how local residents had capacity to develop and maintain their own projects when supported to do so. Long-term involvement in community development had increased capacity to the point where some activists had become experienced at getting support and making funding bids to aid their projects.
- Interview with Manager of the Redwall Alcohol and Drugs Service. This provided information how the service had originally been set up by active residents, again strongly demonstrating that communities have much capacity to plan and implement their own welfare projects.
- Conversation with Abbie. An important part of the discussion was the insight that it gave into how this young woman had acquired capacity and personal fulfilment by attending Salvation Army activities, and by taking on roles as a Soldier. It showed that certain aspects of the Redwall Corps already empower individuals.
- Conversation with Adherent 1. An interesting topic to arise in this conversation was the conflict between Salvation Army stipulations and the local culture embedded in this individual's character and lifestyle. Such a conflict had materialised in the issue of her consuming alcohol and in the criticism of her manner of speech by the Captain. On both occasions the respondent opted to follow her own culture rather than the church's rules. It suggests that respecting local cultures is an important thing for churches to do, to avoid attacking the valued cultural identities of local people.
- Conversation with Adherent 2. This conversation was brief but important in finding out that working to serve meals at the Redwall Corps gave the respondent a real sense of purpose in the week.
- Conversation with lay member. I discovered how attending Sunday worship at the Redwall Corps, enabled this person to sell home baked goods to worshippers in aid of her chosen charities. I therefore discovered a way in which the Redwall Corps indirectly empowered an individual to operate a small project of her own.
- Conversations with parents at the toddler group. The ability of the parents to organise their own social events and to play a very active role in the toddler group was clear. It gave reason to think that these individuals would have capacity to help plan and establish community development projects if they had the right kind of support. And yet, their surprise that followed when I asked whether they had ever been consulted over their ideas for the community, suggested that their input had never been sought.
- Conversations with Family and Children's Worker 1. These conversations were useful for illuminating the origin of the Redwall Corps as a Goodwill Centre funded by the sale of William Booth's books. Also, this worker's efforts as a manager of a children's football team provided a useful example of an outreach project that the local culture could relate to. I discovered that the respondent volunteered at a

homeless hostel in his spare time; an indicator of his sincerity. The same respondent believed that an attempt by the Corps to set up a budgeting class in connection with the toddler group had frightened parents away, seemingly because they had not wanted their low abilities in this field to be shown up.

- Conversations with Family and Children's Worker 2. This interview brought to light the respondent's reasons for doing that work. The chance to perform this compassionate work *and* to be able to give the children Bible teaching, was a greater incentive than the higher salaries offered by the secular teaching profession. Her motive suggested that the respondent was sincere and driven by theological altruism.
- Conversation with the unpaid 'Soldier'. The respondent gave examples of Salvation Army terminology which might be confusing to people unfamiliar with this church's traditions. He also showed me the amount of paperwork that had to be completed and sent to Divisional Headquarters, in order to fund new services at the Redwall Corps. I considered these to be examples of the challenges faced by the Redwall Corps as it worked to serve the community.
- Conversation with a Major from the Divisional Headquarters. This figure admitted that the Salvation Army's social services wing was ahead of its church in terms of empowerment through participation. I followed his suggestion to study a local Salvation Army hostel to find out more for myself.
- Conversation with a man who attended the lunches. This respondent, who seemed to have mental health issues, said that he made several bus journeys to get to this service, suggesting that the Redwall Corps was meeting an important need in his life.
- Conversation with some elderly regulars at the lunches who also attended worship at the Redwall Corps. These respondents spoke tellingly of how other churches were ignoring the older generations in favour of attracting more young people and families. Again the Salvation Army were providing a service that other churches left out. Another point was that some of these regulars had 'shopped around' to find which church best suited their needs. Their reasons for belonging resonated with Etzioni's (1993) compliance structures in which people participate for their own gain. This could be seen as a challenge to the idea that congregations can be inspired to empower others through a community development approach.
- Conversation with the leader of a secular youth group. The leader described some teenage girls who had developed their own values system, based on which of them could best service the sexual needs of the males. I saw this as evidence that some residents were finding ways to counter stigma by creating a subculture in which they could hold themselves in higher esteem.
- Conversation with residents elected to the Redwall Neighbour Partnership. The conversation informed me about this neighbourhood forum and also revealed that they gained a sense of purpose from this form of empowerment.

The intentional community at Diversham

Written sources

- Academic pamphlet outlining a view of regeneration in the city. A history of the city was traced and Diversham was said to lie in the historically poor sector where the working class dwelt among the polluting factories. The pamphlet said that this is a problem that continues today, as planners follow the established pattern of building social housing for the poor in that area. It helps to explain the concentrations of deprivation in Diversham.
- University report. This report provided some of the background to community needs in the city, for example by tracing poverty to the decline of the manufacturing industry. It showed there to be an unequal divide between Diversham and affluent parts of the city, according to indicators such as life expectancy, youth unemployment, education and health.
- Published text on the intentional community. This discussed the strands of thought that had shaped the intentional community, including the outlook of the early Methodists, the liberal theology of Bishop John Robinson, the Iona Community and later on, liberation theology. Highly relevant were the points that this faith group was born at a time when the counter culture movement was challenging established social systems, and that there was a similar will among the intentional community to depart from the corporation-like activity of the established church. The hope was that the new faith group would support members to follow the example of Christ as an initiator of change, by developing their own projects to help others.
- A variety of updates on the Diversham New Deal for Communities. These provided background information about the Diversham ward, detailing for example the extent of ethnic diversity and the cultural barriers that made it hard for some people to receive help. An early report stated that Diversham fell within the top 1% of disadvantaged wards in the country according to the 2001 Index of Multiple Deprivation. The updates pinpointed some positive outcomes arising from the Diversham New Deal for communities, such as extra support for ethnic pupils in school. These were important in balancing out negative points in my appraisal of the top-nature of this scheme. In one report came the news that the annual upkeep of a public building that had been revamped at great cost under the Diversham New Deal could not be met by available funds. This came across as a major failing.
- Community magazine. A couple of letters in the magazine expressed the discontentment of community activists over the Diversham New Deal and the ways in which its management had limited the influence of the local community.

Interviews and conversations

- Interview with member involved in the interfaith seminars. This member said that being given a part in the decision-making of the intentional community inspired him to devote more time and effort to its work. He enjoyed the democratic processes but saw also that foundational features of the intentional community were not necessarily negotiable – so democratic involvement was conducted within certain constraints. The

same respondent commented that the participatory nature of the activities was useful for integrating marginalised people into the group, suggesting that this would be one advantage of churches that adopt community development principles.

- Interview with another member. This woman commented that the intentional community had given her great joy in allowing her to participate in the running of activities. One of her ideas for the communal house had been followed up, which had helped her to feel part of the group. The love and acceptance that she had been shown were also crucial. As an indication of the participatory nature of the intentional community, this individual had been given permission to lead a worship meeting with a traditional focus that differed from the outlook of the group as a whole. However, a negative aspect of participation was also uncovered in the interview, as the respondent said that she was sometimes upset by differences of opinion that arose from democratic dialogue in the intentional community.
- Interview with the founder of the intentional community and his wife. It was revealing to hear how the founder had wanted to create a faith community that encouraged welfare projects to arise out of the ideas and inspiration of the members. Shortcomings of the Diversham New Deal for Communities were attributed to a failure to reproduce this bottom-up model. We discussed the ethical grocery store run by the intentional community. Our discussion examined how the store's themes of social justice attracted new volunteers and how they were then supported to help plan the development of the store. This support even extended to exploring possibilities that the volunteers could run the grocery store as a cooperative in the future. It provided an illustrative example of how churches might use the principles found in community development practice.
- Interview with community activist 1. This local resident spoke of the problems associated with the Diversham New Deal for Communities, particularly with regard to their management's failure to listen to what ordinary people in the community wanted. He had set up an action group to try to pressure the management into responding to the local community, but to no avail. For him, the decision to demolish an entire housing estate was the worst case of regeneration professionals walking all over a community. These were evidences in my fieldwork that top-down approaches to neighbourhood regeneration could go seriously wrong.
- Interview with community activist 2. With similarities to the first community activist, this individual had major misgivings about what had happened under the Diversham New Deal for Communities. A community action group which had been running projects before the New Deal staff arrived, was largely taken over and then closed down by the New Deal management following a series of financial miscalculations. Later, the New Deal came to an abrupt end when funds ran dry, which meant that projects could not be sustained. It had also become very difficult for project workers to criticise regeneration work under the New Deal for fear of having their funding pulled. Again, the evidence suggested that top-down approaches were prone to significant weaknesses such as power play by regeneration professionals.
- Conversation with a leader of the café project. This individual was a regular attender of a traditional church but found that the intentional community had its own merits. The intentional community seemed less bureaucratic and its philosophy of sharing

meant that it tended to organise more social gatherings than the traditional churches. A less positive feature was that the founder had not sufficiently prepared the other members to continue the running of the faith group and its projects after he had gone. There was mention of a couple who had joined with a vision for expanding the group in a certain direction, but had been blocked by the founder. As with other 'windows' into the intentional community, questions were raised as to where the balance between empowerment and guidance really lies in grassroots faith motivated initiatives.

Participant observation

- Street observations of the many different places of worship at Diversham, made me wonder if these faith centres were being used to reinforce cultural identities and lines of division. It seemed that local pubs might be performing the same function for their white British regulars. I thought that these observations, albeit quite speculative, would be worth mentioning when I sketched the setting of the case study area.
- Visit to the grocery store run by the intentional community. This enabled me to see the downstairs area that the student volunteers had transformed into a communal space for members of the public to spend time and eat food. The creativity and organisational skills of the students were apparent in this project, which in turn demonstrated the worth of empowering volunteers to develop their own projects instead of just following orders. In the store window were displays that articulated themes of social justice such as fair trade. Although these displays were inspired by the intentional community's faith outlook, they attracted the interest of volunteers who held no religious faith. From this, it seemed that a faith group might use its own concepts of justice to prompt secular people into getting involved in local projects.
- Attending a seminar at the grocery store. By attending a seminar led by the student volunteers, I saw evidence that the project had spin-off effects in the form of the volunteers making supportive comments towards each other. This suggested to me that churches which empower citizens to come together in community development projects can also foster mutual care among the participants.
- Visits to the café run by the intentional community. I found that people of different faiths served in the café, giving it an ethos of acceptance which the group had wanted to achieve. A petition objecting to the scrapping of adult learning classes, stood as an example of the café pursuing themes of social justice in a way that made an impression even on people who held no religious faith.
- Participating in the Ecclesia Meeting. This worship meeting exhibited some principles akin to community development. There was some degree of empowerment inasmuch as everyone had the chance to lead a meeting, everyone was accepted, and participants were ready to respect and consider views that differed to their own. The seating of the group in a circle reflected the aim of caring and sharing. This also involved some personal risk, because reaching out to other people can make oneself vulnerable. These features seemed like characteristics that a church might gain by learning about community development. I also saw traces of control in the meetings. The use of liturgies indirectly restated the foundational values of the faith group. Also, the founder acted as gatekeeper to the meetings, thus determining who the participants

would be. This brought to mind the fact that activities which are in some ways empowering, can still contain partially hidden mechanisms of control.

- Communion at the communal house. Again, evidences of empowerment and control were present at this meeting. Empowerment was evident in the sense that each person ministered the bread and wine to the individual next to them, thereby reinforcing the concept of the priesthood of all believers. On the other hand, it was here that I overheard the conversation in which the founder advised against raising certain topics at a meeting as these would lead to debate.
- Café church. The thing that came across strongly in this meeting was the importance attached to the thoughts of all the participants. For example, an activity had been carried out to find out topics of faith which the members wanted to discuss in the forthcoming meetings. A leader said that this model of worship allowed him to understand what things were important to the participants. He also said that imparted authority to the views of the laity.

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